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Dynasties, Life, and Culture

Course Guidebook

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Understanding Imperial China:
Dynasties, Life, and Culture

This course's lectures cover a span of history from 221 BCE to 1912 CE. That starts with the moment Ying Zheng proclaimed himself the first emperor of the Qin dynasty and ends with the abdication of Henry Pu Yi, the last emperor of the Qing dynasty. The fact that we can speak of an imperial China stretching from the time of the Roman Republic to the eve of World War I would seem to indicate that this was an era marked more by continuity than change. However, the economies, climates, societies, and cultures over which China's emperors ruled were incredibly complex, varied, and fluid. And the individuals who populated the empire defy simplistic tropes of what it meant to be Chinese.

Rather than focusing exclusively on emperors and high officials, this course explores a broader sweep of history by including the perspectives of imperial subjects and of foreign visitors to the Chinese empire. The daily lives of courtesans, convicts, wives, widows, monks, merchants, and military men reveal the diversity and dynamism of imperial China.

This course takes both a chronological and thematic approach. It charts the progression of dynasties to understand the evolutionary and revolutionary changes that took place over two millennia. But the course also contains lectures dedicated to topics that defy easy periodization. These include lectures on the lives of Chinese peasants: One looks at rural life amid the wheat and sorghum fields of North China, and another examines life in the lush rice paddies of the south.

Other lectures address crucial institutions and the people who operated them. These are the secrets to imperial success that allowed a progression of dynasties, some Chinese and some foreign ruled, to maintain the empire's remarkable unity. These institutions included a vast canal network that knit this huge domain together and the civil service examinations that staffed the bureaucracy and coopted the local elite into the imperial enterprise.

When the canals and the exams were fully functional, the health of the imperial body politic was generally good; when they started to fail, however, dynastic survival was in jeopardy. This course covers both extremes of imperial health and many degrees in between. ■

OPIUM, TRADE, AND WAR IN IMPERIAL CHINA

By the turn of the 20th century, when China was ruled by the Qing Dynasty, as much as 15 percent of China's population used opium. Consequently, among China's 60 million users, there must have been hundreds of thousands of addicts at any one time. Opium abuse wasn't a uniquely Chinese activity—in the 19th century, it was just as much a problem in the United States and Britain. However, in one version of China's national narrative, the sale and use of opium—and especially its forced importation into China—are inseparable from foreign invasion and national humiliation.

OPIUM IN CHINA

- The original source for most of China's opium was India. Once 18th-century British colonial authorities discovered that high-quality Patna and cheap Malwa opium were popular in China, they promoted poppy cultivation and opium production. Meanwhile, social and economic trends within China created a large—and growing—market for the drug, long before the Indian opium juggernaut came online.

- For all of opium's allure—and medical benefits—it can be highly addictive. And as with all addictions, personal tragedy and social disruption come in addiction's wake.

- The prevailing view was well summarized by H. H. Kane, the American doctor and author of the book *Opium-Smoking in America and China*. He wrote that "[opium] is bound to sink morality ... a fertile cause of crime, lying, insanity, debt, and suicide; a poison to hope and ambition; a slanderer of family ties; a breeder of sensuality and, finally, impotence."

Opium War naval combat

- Opium is also a loaded topic from the perspective of China's national history and national narrative. A common phrase for this stretch is "the century of humiliation." In the Chinese imagination, the century of humiliation began with the Opium War of 1839–1842, in which a venal British Empire went to war to defend its lucrative opium trade.

- China's defeat and the peace treaties it signed are thought to have systematically undermined China's power and sovereignty, leaving it open to foreign exploitation. This trend reached its nadir during the brutal Japanese occupation of China in the 1930s and 1940s.

OPIUM'S REALITY

- Despite the specter of addiction, historically, most opium users in China were moderate and occasional users. Additionally, opium can be a very useful drug, and not just as a painkiller, especially in a world without ready access to advanced medical care. For instance, penicillin—a cure for many common ailments that opium was used to mitigate—wasn't widely available in China until the 1940s.

- Opium is also effective at treating the symptoms of pneumonia and other respiratory ailments, inflammations of the internal organs, malaria, typhoid, and cholera. It's a treatment for nervous disorders, dysentery, colitis, and a host of other gastrointestinal ailments.

- As a recreational drug, moderate opium intake produces a pleasant high comparable to alcohol. It was entirely reasonable for an average family in imperial China to keep a small supply of opium for medical reasons or to enjoy a relaxing smoke on special occasions.

- Most users don't build up a tolerance to opium and thus don't feel compelled to constantly increase their consumption to get the same high. But for those in the minority who are physiologically and psychologically prone to opium addiction, the outcome can be awful, and withdrawal may be daunting.

- Long-term opium use can cause the body to stop producing endorphins. Those are our natural pain managers. Going without them makes withdrawal excruciating. Quitting opium can also cause a cascade of all those common maladies that the poppy juice had been holding at bay: insomnia, seizures, hallucinations, delusions, and paranoia.

- And it can exacerbate preexisting mental health conditions, such as bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and sociopathic behavior. This is where addiction reaches beyond the individual to the family and society.

THE INTRODUCTION OF OPIUM

- Opium originated in the Eastern Mediterranean and made its way to China in the holds of Arab ships, or brought via camel caravan from Southwest Asia.

- Medical and recreational consumption of opium in China long predated the drug's massive 19th-century importation. The earliest references to opium date to the 1st and 2nd century CE. We see pharmacopeia discussions of its medicinal merits during the Tang Dynasty from 618 to 907.

- By the Song dynasty, which ended in 1279, the medicinal value of the sticky residue extracted from the poppy was widely recognized. Su Shi, an iconic Song dynasty man of letters, sang the praises of the poppy—and apparently ingested his fair share of opium.

THE TURNING POINT

- Opium's turning point came during the late Ming dynasty. Up to that point, most opium users swallowed opium, hence the term poppy eaters. But in the late 1500s, the Dutch introduced the practice of mixing opium with a new American crop—tobacco.

Chinese opium smokers

- This mixture is called madak, and is smoked through a pipe. The experience is both pleasant and simple. The effects are almost immediate. Smoking straight tobacco and madak quickly became an integral part of elite social life. And smoking readily lent itself to connoisseurship and high fashion.

- Like fine wine or single-malt scotch today, China's opium fashion took on many forms, many flavors, and many variations—all of them things that connoisseurs obsessed about.

- As opium smoking became a marker of elite status, the appeal started to migrate down the social ladder. As a result, the late Ming period marked the beginning of China's long love affair with smoking and smoking

culture. This began with pipe tobacco and madak in the 16th to 18th centuries, which was followed by pure opium in the 19th century and cigarettes in the 20th and 21st centuries.

- In the 16th century, the government of the Ming dynasty started to tax medicinal opium sales. This would prove to be a steady and lucrative source of revenue. The Qing dynasty that followed the Ming dynasty had a much more schizophrenic opium policy. It alternately taxed and banned the drug and couldn't seem to figure out if it was a social scourge or a source of revenue.

- In the early 19th century, some Qing officials were growing concerned about both the societal costs of opium use and by the impact the Opium trade was having on the economy, especially the silver supply. The huge outflow of silver from Chinese consumers to British suppliers to pay for Indian opium reversed what had been a trade imbalance in China's favor since the 16th century.

A CONVERGENCE

- Qing officials were getting worried. A major dip in silver supply was a potential catalyst for economic crisis and social unrest. In 19th-century China, a convergence of four factors occured:

  1. A preexisting opium culture.

  2. A rapidly growing domestic population, large sectors of which had a modest amount of spending money.

  3. A series of epidemics such as cholera that brought intense pain and distress to millions of Chinese.

  4. A cheap and potent supply of Indian opium that wound its way through China's sophisticated internal markets.

- By the 1830s, opium had become enough of a concern that the Qing government was forced to act. However, the imposition of domestic prohibitions made little headway. The government was particularly hard pressed when it came to opium smuggling.

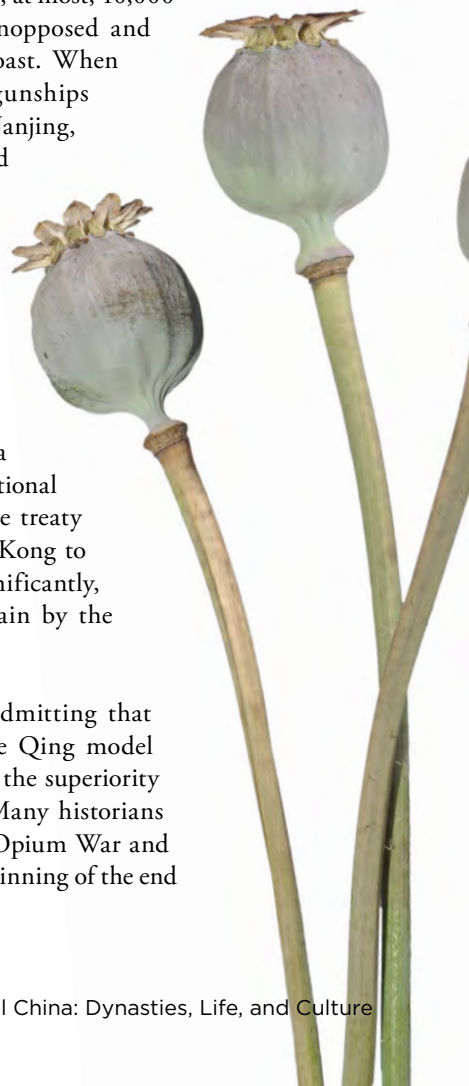
- Compact and high-value opium cargoes could be loaded onto fleets of small boats, called fast crabs and scrambling dragons. These shallow-draft galleys easily outran government ships, darting in and out of the numerous coves and inlets along a porous coastline.

- In response, the government moved farther up the supply chain. Its opium czar, Lin Zexu, was posted to the port of Canton, northwest of Hong Kong. Lin used his mandate from the emperor to force merchants from the west to halt all imports of opium.

Destruction of opium in 1839

- Lin's methods included holding foreign merchants hostage until they signed an affidavit renouncing the opium trade. He also destroyed millions of dollars' worth of opium. These actions were a casus belli for Great Britain. Lin Zexu's well-intentioned war on drugs led to the Qing's disastrous defeat in the Opium War of 1839–1842.

- In that conflict, Qing forces were routed at every turn by a relatively small British expedition of, at most, 10,000 men. The British moved largely unopposed and harassed ports up and down the coast. When the Royal Navy's steam-driven gunships threatened the southern capital at Nanjing, upriver from Shanghai, the Qing had no choice but to seek terms.



FALLOUT

- The 1842 Treaty of Nanjing included the payment of reparations in silver along with increased foreign access to the China market and the opening of four additional ports along the southeast coast. The treaty also called for the cession of Hong Kong to Britain, a fixed tariff, and, most significantly, full diplomatic recognition of Britain by the Qing emperor.

- That's equivalent to the emperor admitting that Queen Victoria was his equal. The Qing model of foreign relations was prefaced on the superiority of its emperor to all other rulers. Many historians identify this military defeat in the Opium War and the subsequent treaty terms as the beginning of the end of imperial China.

- With respect to the ongoing opium trade, the opening of more ports increased and broadened British India's access to China, and demand easily kept pace.

- By the 1870 and 1880s—when imports peaked at nearly 10 million pounds a year—opium use was more pervasive than ever. But domestic production was rapidly catching up. By the end of the 19th century, most Chinese were smoking Chinese rather then Indian opium.

- All aspects of the opium phenomenon—from poppy cultivation to opium's distribution and consumption—became inextricably bound up with late imperial culture, society, and economics.

- Keep in mind that not all opium smokers were addicts. But as opium became more potent and cheaper—and as many Chinese shifted from smoking madak to pure opium—addiction became a major problem. By the turn of the 20th century, the opium wretch who'd ruined himself and his family had become a stock character in Chinese fiction and drama, much like the stereotypical drunk or junkie in American popular culture.

- The Qing dynasty was also having trouble meeting expenses, and not just war reparations to Britain. Tax revenues were down. At the same time, the dynasty faced massive internal rebellions and the mounting costs of modernizing its civil institutions and its military.

- Since opium smoking was especially prevalent at the Qing court, in the provincial and local bureaucracy, and among soldiers, fiscal problems were compounded by the debilitating effects of drug use on effective governance and national defense. If all that wasn't bad enough, domestic poppy cultivation was such a lucrative cash crop that it crowded out grain, maize, and sweet potatoes. That made rural society less resistant to famine.

- When the Qing dynasty—the last to rule China—fell in 1911–1912, warlords who controlled large swaths of territory filled the political vacuum. Those warlords saw opium as a revenue source for their private fiefdoms and personal armies. Peasants under their rule were often forced to grow poppies at the expense of food crops. Like Afghanistan today, post-imperial China was a narco-state.

1911–1912 revolutionary war, which saw the end of the Qing dynasty

- In the 1930s, the Japanese army used opium profits to fund their occupation of eastern China. Opium was thus inextricably tied to a wider national crisis in post-imperial China, defined by political fragmentation, civil war, and foreign invasion.

- It was only with the communist consolidation of power in the 1950s and 1960s that opium cultivation and consumption were largely eliminated, though even then only with the totalitarian regime's extensive use of terror and coercion.

SUGGESTED READING

Booth, *Opium: A History*.
Lee, *Opium Culture*.
Lovell, *The Opium War*.
Polachek, *The Inner Opium War*.
Spence, "Opium."

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- How and why did imperial China get hooked on opium? How did the spread of opium smoking reflect other changes going on in Chinese society?

- What were the attractions of opium culture?

- Why is opium such a loaded topic in modern Chinese history? Has your image of opium use and opium users changed?

- Why did it prove so difficult for the Qing government to curtail either the supply of or the demand for opium?

Lecture 2

THE FIRST EMPEROR'S TERRACOTTA WARRIORS

In 1974, some farmers were digging a well when they struck a vast underground vault. Inside was a spectacular discovery: a terracotta army of several thousand warriors. Each of these fired-clay figures stands more than six feet tall and weighs about 600 pounds. They all bear individual features, as if modeled after living men. The burial ground is found in Li Yi, east of the ancient Qin capital of Xianyang, near modern Xi'an in China's Shaanxi Province. This lecture takes a look at the creation of this amazing discovery and at daily life during China's first empire: the Qin dynasty, which ran from 221 to 206 BCE.

THE TOMB

- The unearthed terracotta warriors were just the beginning. Since 1974, archaeologists have discovered an elaborate tomb complex—a necropolis for Qinshi Huangdi, China's first emperor who unified China's Warring States in the 3rd century BCE.

- For the afterlife, this emperor needed palaces, temples, stables, kitchens, and audience halls. There are terracotta musicians and an entire clay circus troupe for entertainment. Arrayed around the tumulus are the graves of imperial consorts and imperial officials—an eternal imperial retinue.

THE RULER

- As for Qinshi Huangdi himself, a scathing account of his reign is present in a book called *Records of the Grand Historian*, written in the 1st century BCE by the Han dynasty historian Sima Qian.

- Among the emperor's alleged sins was murdering scholars by the hundreds and burning books by the thousands in an effort to erase alternatives to the Qin dynasty's philosophy of legalism. That was an amoral doctrine of might-makes-right statecraft.

- Recent scholarship, however, is challenging some of the conventional wisdom. For example, all those disappearing books and missing scholars might simply have been relocated to libraries and academies in the Qin capital, where their intellectual pursuits could be centralized.

- The first emperor ruled China with the same obsession for standardization and centralization—and the same mania for mass mobilization—that he used to conquer China.

- When the 13-year-old ruler, then named Ying Zheng, ascended the Qin throne in 247 BCE, the kingdom of Qin was just one of seven major powers called the Warring States. By 221, the other states were extinguished.

Qinshi Huangdi, the first emperor of China

- Ying Zheng and the Qin prevailed because his kingdom was mobilized for war through centralized bureaucratic control. Qin was supremely autocratic in contrast with some Warring States that were still more like confederations of aristocratic clans. Qin bureaucrats—selected and promoted on merit—systematically registered and taxed the dynasty's growing population, and they mobilized thousands of the empire's subjects for huge public works projects.

STANDARDIZATION

- The ultimate hallmark of the Qin was standardization. As part of its own internal consolidation, the Qin standardized legal codes, weights and measures, axle widths, and currency. It introduced a simpler written script. As the kingdom expanded, it used standardization to integrate conquered territories.

- Its military was primarily infantry. Hundreds of thousands of farm boys received the same arms, armor, and the training. The state owned the copper and tin mines, ran the smelting furnaces, and made sure that its smiths forged bronze weapons that met the Qin's exacting standards.

- The ancient bronze crossbow triggers unearthed with the terracotta warriors are finely made and easy to operate. Their parts are interchangeable with triggers made hundreds of miles away.

Terracotta soldiers in trenches

XIANYANG

- China's first imperial capital was Xianyang, in the Wei River Valley—the main east-west corridor from the North China plain. The Qin heartland was agriculturally self-sufficient and naturally defensible. It was a secure base for the dynasty's 4th-century BCE period of consolidation and its 3rd-century campaigns of conquest.

- Xianyang was a walled city full of palaces. It housed the original Qin royal palace, replicas of the royal palaces of the six Warring States that Qin had conquered, and a new Imperial palace.

- Xianyang was home to many government officials. The government had ministries for rituals, taxation, agriculture, horses, war, and writing and enforcing the law. There were other ministries for roads and walls, as well.

AGRICULTURE

- In the 4th century, the Qin decreed that all agricultural land should be carved up as a rectilinear grid. Grids of fields were demarcated by roads and family fields demarcated by footpaths.

- The acreage was based on how much a farming family could reasonably cultivate. This grid system facilitated imperial accounting and provided officials with a better idea of crop yields, tax revenues, and population.

- It was all a form of social control. The grids broke down family and local loyalties and transformed villages from organic enclosed communities into administrative units.

- Qin technocrats also published farming manuals and experimented with new crops. State and private firms alike were pumping out all manner of iron farm implements. And the state maintained grain mills to process the crop.

THE TERRACOTTA TOMB

- Soon after Ying Zheng became king, he chose the site for his royal tomb, Li Yi. It is in the foothills of Mount Li, about 20 miles from Xianyang. This site is famed for its gold and jade mines and rich clay deposits. That abundant clay is why so many of the grave goods were made of terracotta.

- Li Yi had two sets of rectangular walls about 25 feet wide and 30 feet high. The inner wall, which defined the emperor's personal space, was 3,000 feet by 1,500 feet.

- The inner sanctum was dominated by an immense pyramidal tomb—a tumulus. It was said to contain the casket and grave goods of the emperor as well as a model of the entire world with the imperial capital at the center, the heavens mapped out above, and with seas and rivers on the floor coursing with mercury.

Ying Zheng's tomb complex at Mount Li

- The massive outer wall of the necropolis surrounded support facilities such as kitchens, offices, and stables. They were full of activity. Sima Qian tells us that 30,000 households were resettled here to work on the project. Li Yi was a hive of industry complete with armies of carpenters, painters, masons, and potters.

- To the east of the tumulus—and more than a kilometer beyond the outer wall—is the terracotta army, more than 7,000 strong. The ancient Chinese saw the afterlife as a longer version of this life, including an analogous social structure and daily needs like food, money, clothing, and tools.

- But why was there an army? The first emperor was obsessed with immortality. He sent expeditions across the empire to seek out alchemists and elixirs—but he was also hedging his bets.

- If immortality were beyond his grasp, he still had ample buy-in for imperial status in the afterlife. He expected that would give him privileged access to the forces of the divine and allow his dynasty to endure for generations, if not eternity.

- People of all social strata in the Qin Dynasty made similar, albeit less ostentatious, preparations for the afterlife. For example, craftsmen probably expected to be craftsmen in the afterlife, and would likely be buried with grave goods representing *their* daily needs.

- This continues up to present day, with the use of ghost money and other funerary offerings across Asia. It is a tradition of venerating ancestors and supplying them with the symbolic means to survive and thrive long after death.

- For an emperor who unified China by force, an army for the afterlife makes sense. After all, the army faces east, ready to march out and assert Qin dominance over the dead kings that the first emperor conquered in life.

BUILDING THE ARMY

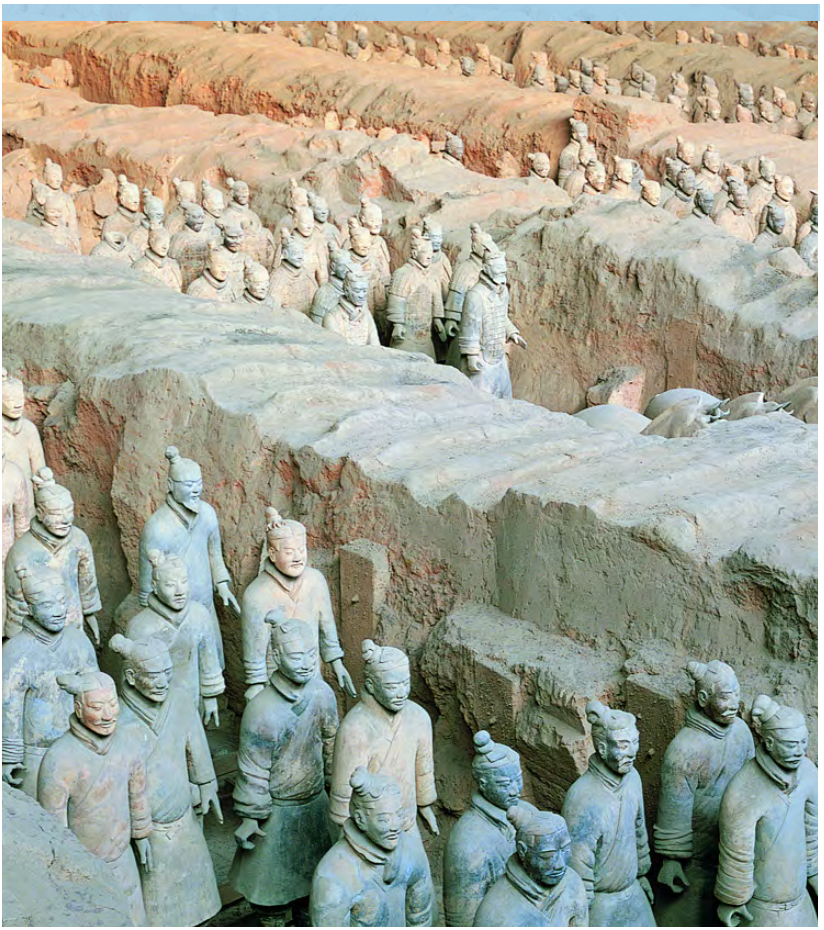
- Like almost everything else around the capital, the assembly and firing of the terracotta figures was run like the military: hierarchical, bureaucratic and meritocratic.

- Success was rewarded and failure punished. For instance, monumental terracotta is prone to thermal shock—in other words, catastrophic failure when cold clay is fired. If you were the craftsman that solved that problem, you'd have been promoted and moved up the social ladder.

- The skilled artisans doing the fine work on the warriors were paid in imperial coin. They used standardized tools and measuring devices produced in government workshops. They traveled on government roads, worked in a regimented organization, and lived in a regimented society.

- Yet for all that regimentation and standardization, the army that emerged from this process was remarkably diverse. No two figures are exactly alike, and this reveals much about the mechanics of making the terracotta army.

- Even at a distance, the variety is apparent. Up close, the variations are even richer: facial expressions and body types all seem unique. The effect would have been magnified by the detailed hand-painting of each statue.



- Since each warrior is different, some speculate that they're portraits of select members of the imperial guard, but that's probably not the case. Instead, the variations arise from how they were made.

  - There were as many as 100 different 10-man teams, each under a master potter. Each team produced subtly different body styles.

  - The figures were built in phases. Rather than using molds, torsos were gradually built up with coils of wet clay. This produced a lot of variation in these torsos.

  - The last phase before firing was attaching and tooling hairstyles, facial hair, and head-dressings. The clay of each progressive attachment was still wet and worked by human hands. This modular production system would make each figure unique. Variations in heat, humidity, and clay composition would also affect what came out of the kiln.

- All told, the 100 squads could produce a total of 700 warriors per year. There are four pits at the site. Pit 1, the most famous, contains a 6,000-man army. Pits 2 and 3 contain a command headquarters and a guard unit. But Pit 4 is empty. Had the emperor not died in 210, it's easy to imagine another several thousand warriors filling that fourth pit.

- Once each soldier cooled, another set of craftsmen would set to work lacquering him in brilliant hues. The completed warrior was then gingerly moved into position, from the back of the pit to the front. The pit itself was covered by a huge wood and tile roof. Once in formation, a warrior was outfitted with real weapons.

- The terracotta army is a microcosm of the short-lived Qin dynasty. At Li Yi, the Qin dynasty came full circle. The techniques for manning and equipping a living army to conquer an empire were committed to creating an army for the afterlife.

- Qin was becoming a proto-industrial society. A large population, advanced technology, and a well-oiled bureaucracy made monumental feats of construction like this tomb—and the roads, and the walls, and the Qin agricultural system—possible.

- But the Qin couldn't control everything—not the variations between the terracotta warriors, and certainly not the emperor's mortality. The farther one got from Xianyang, and the farther one got from the imperial roads, the bigger the disparity became between the ideal of order and the realities of governing a huge, diverse state.

- Moreover, the first emperor's obsession with regimentation and with massive public works projects rankled regional power-holders. They rose in revolt soon after his death.

SUGGESTED READING

Lewis, *The Early Chinese Empires*.
Wills, "The First Emperor of Qin (Qin Shihuang)."

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What does the terracotta army tell us about views of the afterlife in the Qin dynasty?

- What opportunities were available to craftspeople working under the Qin dynasty?

- How does the construction of the terracotta army reflect the first emperor's vision of how society should be ordered? What does it tell us about the state of technology and bureaucratic organization in early imperial China?

Lecture 3

CHINA'S EARLY GOLDEN AGE: THE HAN DYNASTY

The first emperor of China's Qin dynasty died in 210 BCE. China's first empire started to unravel almost immediately. A brutal succession struggle erupted among Qin courtiers and imperial princes. A military officer named Chen Sheng organized a short-lived but intense rebellion against the self-destructing Qin. Then came Xiang Yu, a general from the reconstituted state of Chu—a state that Qin had conquered less than generation before. In 207, Xiang Yu's Chu armies shattered the Qin army at the Battle of Julu in the present-day province of Hebei. But it was Liu Bang—a peasant and common soldier from what is now the Jiangsu province—who would ultimately prevail.

LIU BANG

- Liu Bang had joined Xiang Yu's forces and rapidly rose through the ranks. It was General Liu Bang who accepted the surrender of the last Qin emperor. Xiang Yu named Liu Bang the king of Han, a remote fiefdom.

- The name Han derives from the Han River, located in the region. More than 90 percent of modern China's people are Han, an ethnic group that derives its name from the long-lived dynasty that Liu Bang founded.

- In 202 BCE, Liu defeated his former ally, Xiang Yu, and became Han Gaozu, which means something like "supreme ancestral emperor of Han." This marks the beginning of China's second imperial dynasty—the Han—which endured until 220 CE.

Emperor Gaozu of Han (Liu Bang)

- This lecture focuses on the Western Han, dates 206 BCE to 9 CE. Its capital was in the west, at Chang'an. The Eastern Han would rule from the eastern city of Luoyang from 25 to 220 CE.

- Emperor Gaozu was from the east, near modern Shanghai. But he chose to locate his capital in the Wei River region the heartland of the short-lived Qin dynasty. The emperor named his magnificent new capital Chang'an, meaning "perpetual peace."

LIFE OF THE NOBILITY

- Liu Bang had taken the title of emperor—a Qin convention—located his capital in the Qin heartland, and adopted the Qin system of using military governors to rule the western half of his empire. But in the east he set up his relatives and allies as hereditary kings to rule on his behalf. This was a hybrid of Qin centralization in the west and pre-Qin feudalism in the east.

- Numerous tombs from the Western Han have been unearthed in recent decades, providing us with an astonishingly clear window into the daily lives of the Han nobility.

- One reason that these tombs are so helpful for understanding the lives of these people derives from the way the ancient Chinese understand the human soul. Traditional belief had it that the soul had two parts: the *hun* and the *po*.

Mural painting of a banquet scene from the Han dynasty tomb of Ta-hu-t'ing

- The *hun*, or cloud soul, was the ethereal portion that traveled to heaven after death. The *po*, or white soul, was the corporeal part, and it remained on earth with the body. At a funeral the *hun* gets a nice send off, but the *po* needs to be provided for with grave goods: daily necessities for the afterlife. And the better the life you lived, the more elaborate your neccessities for the afterlife needed to be.

- One notable tomb was that of Lady Dai. She was the wife of the marquis of Dai (himself the prime minister to the king of Chu, a semi-autonomous kingdom). Lady Dai's *po* was outfitted in high style

- In her tomb were more than 1,400 artifacts: hundreds of pieces of lacquer ware, a full lacquer dining service, and an elaborate and intricate toiletry case, with nested boxes and vials containing her makeup and fragrances. The lady herself was wrapped in 20 of her finest silk garments and cocooned within four nested lacquered coffins.

- Within the lacquer ware was a gastronomic treasure trove: It contained venison, rabbit, suckling pig, mutton, dog, wild boar, duck, goose, pheasant, squab, quail, and sparrow's eggs.

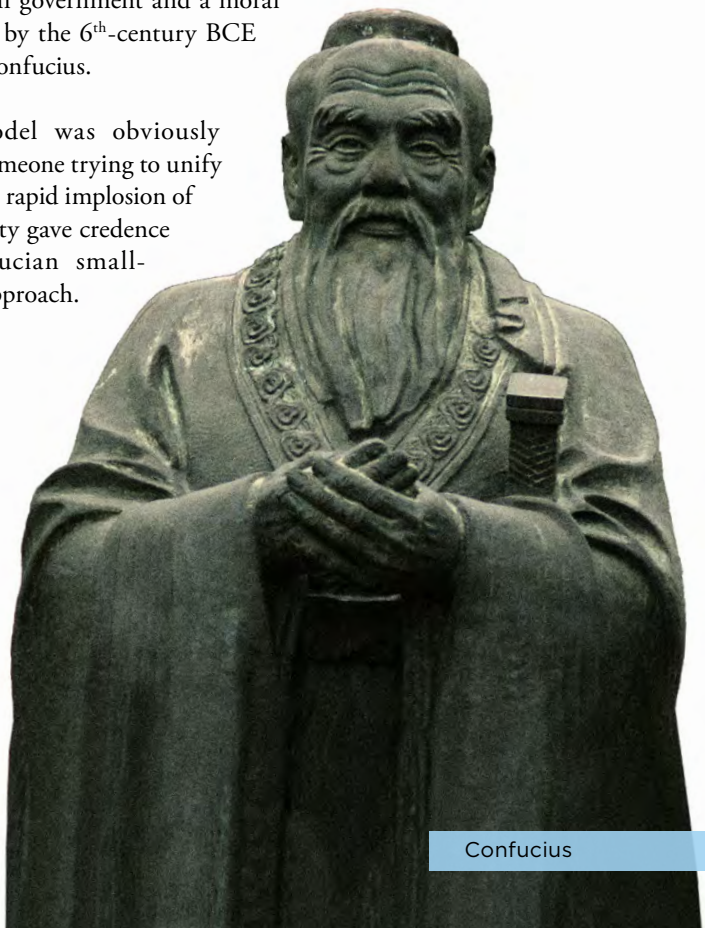
Lady Dai

NOBILITY

- The nobility had been critical to Liu Bang's victory in the post-Qin civil wars and in his early attempts to consolidate his new dynasty. But they also represented a challenge. They created alternative centers of political and military power and set up a powerful tension between the imperial center and the nobility of the regions.

- Balancing that tension was essential to the dynasty's durability. At one end was the ideological and institutional extremism of the Qin dynasty: a "might makes right" view of politics, which appealed to activist emperors. The other end appealed to the regional elites; it favored small government and a moral ethos inspired by the 6th-century BCE philosopher Confucius.

- The Qin model was obviously attractive to someone trying to unify China. But the rapid implosion of the Qin dynasty gave credence to the Confucian small-government approach.



Confucius

- Early Han emperors tried to have it both ways and favored a brand called imperial Confucianism; this relied on a unified curriculum and an emphasis on public service and respect for authority, especially imperial authority. But by endorsing Confucianism, emperors introduced a potential check on their authority.

- In Confucianism, the most important relationship was the bond between father and son. Confucius expected sons to respect their fathers. This is *xiào*, or filial piety. That's appealing to an emperor as the symbolic father of the people, but the father was also expected to be benevolent to his children.

- Another component was the civil service exams, which tested would-be officials on their understanding of Confucianism. Most officials earned their positions based on their aristocratic pedigree, but the exams opened the door for a few small-government Confucians to enter the corridors of power.

LAW AND FORCE

- Early Han emperors understood that they had to ratchet back the inclination to rule like the Qin had. They also had to work out the tension between the civilian aspects of governance, called *wen*, and the need to maintain a robust military, called *wu*.

- Liu Bang tried to quickly demobilize and disband his armies after coming to power. But strategic challenges, foreign and domestic, meant that the military would remain large and politically powerful during the Han period, though not quite on the scale or pervasiveness of the highly militarized Qin.

- The Han also moderated the strict laws and nasty punishments that were another hallmark of the Qin. Clearly written laws that were impartially adjudicated were signs of good governance and imperial legitimacy. But if the legal system was too draconian, it could threaten the longevity of

the ruling house. Liu Bang himself had initially rebelled against the Qin rather than face the death penalty for allowing some prisoners under his watch to escape.

- The Han founder knew firsthand that overly strict laws could be the catalyst for rebellion. But for all that, the Han legal system remained much the same as that of the Qin.

LINEAGE

- In the early Han period, a powerful tension played out between loyalty to one's own lineage and loyalty to the emperor. This is captured dramatically in Liu Bang's own family.

- Decades before he revolted, Liu Bang had married a smart and capable woman by the name of Lu Zhi. Family names come first in China; Liu Bang's family name is Liu, and Lu Zhi's lineage is Lu. But Chinese women keep their family name after marriage. This is to indicate that even after marriage, a wife is not considered fully part of her husband's family (though her children are).

- When Liu Bang took the throne, she became empress. Their son, Liu Ying, became heir apparent. The empress outmaneuvered the emperor when he seemed bent on replacing Liu Ying as heir with the son of one of his concubines. She ultimately had that concubine done away with.

- After Liu Ying came to the throne in 196, his mother became empress dowager and she grew even more powerful. She forced her son to marry his cousin on his mother's side--emphasizing the Lu family over that of the Liu. Lu Zhi was the power behind the throne for 15 years.

- But upon her death, the Lu lineage was forced out, and the Liu clan reasserted itself with another son of Liu Bang by one of his consorts. His name was Liu Heng, and he became Emperor Wen in 180 BCE.

A GOLDEN AGE

- The ascension of Emperor Wen marks the beginning of imperial China's first golden age, which lasted from 180 to the death of his grandson Emperor Wu in 87 BCE. This was a century of relative stability during which many essential institutions of imperial China were established. China's legal code and tax system were codified.

- On the frontiers, Emperor Wen and his son, Emperor Jing, tackled the security threat posed by a powerful confederation of nomadic tribes known as the Xiongnu. They stabilized existing borders with a combination of military reprisals and marriage treaties, under which Han princesses and palace women were married to Xiongnu chieftains in exchange for peace and obedience.

- The era was not without its problems. One major crisis of the period is known as the Rebellion of the Seven States. Gaozu had set up his relatives and allies as hereditary kings to rule on his behalf in the eastern half of the empire; these were the seven states.

Emperor Wu of Han

- In 154 BCE, Emperor Jing tried to curtail the power of these semi-autonomous states. The king of Chu—the home state of Lady Dai and her husband—joined the rebellion. The defeat of the seven kings substantially enhanced the power of the Han emperor.

- That internal consolidation set the stage for the expansionist policies of Emperor Wu, otherwise known as Han Wudi. Wudi wanted secure borders and a stable homefront. Internally, Wudi sought to limit the power of the feudal aristocracy. He also wanted to crush the Xiongnu.

- In Han Wudi's eyes, the empire's merchant class stood in the way of both objectives. The Han government had always been suspicious of merchants—and somewhat insecure—because they were dependent on moneylenders. The wealthiest merchants matched—even exceeded—the lifestyles of the nobility, which the latter found galling.

- For about a decade, the emperor financed his military offensives with the treasure amassed by his frugal father and grandfather. Han armies pushed into Central Asia. Flush with success, Wudi then launched additional campaigns into northern Korea, northern Vietnam, and into areas that are now southwest China.

- But once his war chest was exhausted, Wudi turned to new potential sources of revenue. In 117 BCE, he decreed that salt and iron would be government monopolies, which reenergized the frontier wars.

- But such campaigns were expensive, as was the cost of maintaining alliances—and garrisons—across such a breadth of newly conquered territory. And it was expensive to relocate large populations of Chinese to settle these new imperial lands.

- Conversely, the resettlement of non-Chinese within the Han boundaries created all manner of additional financial and security challenges. So for all of his glorious achievements, Wudi's later years were marked by financial distress, popular unrest, and bizarre palace intrigues.

AFTER WUDI

- Less than a decade after Wudi's death in 87 BCE, a senior minister and former merchant, Sang Hongyang, is said to have called for a debate on Wudi's foreign and domestic policies at the court of his son, Emperor Zhao. The debate is recorded in a text known as the "Discourses on Salt and Iron."

- Sang defended the monopolies on strategic grounds. He said the empire needed to control the production and distribution of essential commodities. The anti-monopoly Confucians countered that the government's iron implements were poorly made and ill served peasant farmers. They said the empire and its subjects would be better off if small smithies could get back into making iron tools.

- The Confucians didn't win this debate. But it sized up the two sides' emerging positions. And it's remarkable to see that the educated elite pushed back against the emperor and his chancellor, Sang Hongyang.

Emperor Zhao of Han

SUGGESTED READING

Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and its Enemies*.
Hinsch, *Women in Early Imperial China*.
Lewis, *The Early Chinese Empires*.
Loewe, *Everyday Life in Early Imperial China*.
National Geographic, *The Diva Mummy*.
Yu, "Life and Immortality in the Mind of Han China."

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- How might the Han dynasty's frontier wars have affected the daily lives of the empire's subjects on the home front?
- What does Lady Dai's tomb reveal about Chinese views of the afterlife? What does her diet reveal about the class system and economy of China during the Western Han period?
- How does the status and quality of life of elite women in the Han dynasty compare to that of elite women in other ancient cultures?

AMAZING BAN CLAN: HISTORIAN, SOLDIER, WOMAN

In the 1st century CE, three remarkable siblings were born to the prominent scholar and official Ban Biao. This was during the period known as the Eastern Han, which ranges from 25 to 220 CE. During this period, the Han Dynasty capital was Luoyang in the east, as opposed to Chang'an in the west. Ban Biao's eldest son, Ban Gu, would pursue a life of learning that brought him fame and suspicion. Ban Gu's brother, Ban Chao, was a renowned soldier, instrumental in reasserting Han control over the Tarim Basin (in present-day Xinjiang Province) and projecting Chinese power out along the Silk Road. Their younger sister, Ban Zhao, was an influential scholar, teacher, and poet. Her writings helped to shape the role of women and families among the elite and in the imperial court.

Gentlemen in conversation, Eastern Han dynasty

WANG MANG

- In 9 CE, the Han dynasty was overthrown by a man named Wang Mang, who founded a dynasty called the Xin—a word that literally means "new," or "renewed." Considered a cold-blooded tyrant by some and a romantic idealist by others, Wang Mang claimed to be returning the empire to the traditions of the semi-mythic Zhou dynasty, founded around 1046 BCE.

- In Wang's mind, he was rebooting the corrupted dynastic structure of the 1st century CE back to its pure form of the 11th century BCE. Wang reinstituted the Zhou system of titles. He recalled all currencies for replacement with his own elaborate coinage, based on the Zhou model. And, most significantly, he eliminated private ownership, making all land the property of the emperor.

- Wang Mang's policies quickly unraveled, and his short-lived dynasty succumbed to a lethal combination of elite resistance and peasant rebellions. A minor branch of the family of a previous Han emperor toppled Wang Mang and restored the Han dynasty in 25 CE. So began what we call the Eastern Han.

THE BAN CLAN

- The Ban clan made their fortunes in the livestock business, but they owed much of their power and privilege to a woman about whom we know little, the Consort Ban. We do know that she was the daughter of a court official and concubine to Wang Zhengyuan's son, Emperor Cheng. She was erudite and renowned for her poetry. Her erudition had helped save her brother from a charge of treason, and, as a result, he lived to father a son, Ban Biao.

- Ban Biao—was born near the Western Han capital of Chang'an and served the Eastern Han from its new capital at Luoyang. A historian and biographer, Ban Biao was critical of a distinguished predecessor: the Western Han's greatest historian and biographer, Sima Qian, author of the *Shiji* or *The Records of the Grand Historian*.

- Ban thought Sima Qian paid insufficient attention to the moral qualities of his subjects, focusing instead on their audacious achievements. Ban Biao felt that history and biography needed to emphasize Confucian virtue.

- Ban Biao's twin sons—Ban Gu and Ban Chao—were born in 32 CE, and his daughter, Ban Zhao, in 45. The firstborn twin, Ban Gu, followed closest in his father's scholarly footsteps.

BAN GU

- Ban Gu was a promising young scholar and studied at the imperial academy at Luoyang. When the father died in 54 CE, Ban Gu—holding true to Confucian precepts—abandoned his official duties and returned to the Ban estate to observe a three-year period of mourning.

- Ban Gu locked himself away in the family's great library to read—and reread—his father's biographical and historical essays. He emerged committed to writing a morally centered history of the Western Han to counter Sima Qian's bias for the powerful.

- Ban Gu's *Hanshu*, or *Book of the Han*, is the first example of a dynastic history. It covers the span from the fall of the Qin dynasty in 206 BCE to the fall of Wang Mang in 25 CE. By contrast, Sima Qian had written a sweeping history covering the mythic past all the way up to the early emperors of the Han.

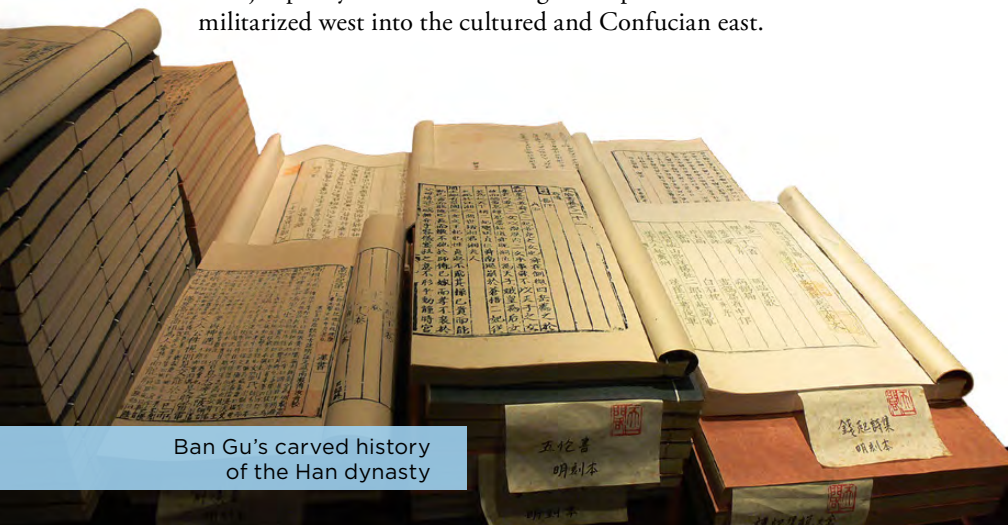
- Ban Gu drew no distinction between the Western and Eastern Han. Those are later labels. Instead, Ban Gu glorified and legitimized the restored Han by contrasting its virtues and genius to the failings of its Western Han predecessor and of Wang Mang's short-lived Xin dynasty.

- Ban Gu had begun this morally judgmental history of the Han dynasty without approval or oversight from the rulers of the Eastern Han. When the authorities found out what Ban Gu was up to, he was arrested and his notes and library confiscated. Ban Gu was assigned to an imperial think tank, where his research could be supervised.

- After several years of scrutiny, the emperor relented and allowed Ban Gu to return to his history of the Western Han. Two of his writings give a sense of where Ban Gu stood: an essay called the "Treatise on Food and Money" and a literary piece called a rhapsody or fu, "The Fu on the Two Capitals"

  - The "Treatise on Food and Money" is an economic history of China from the Zhou dynasty to the first century CE and a critique of the economic policies of the early Han. It resonates closely with the small-government arguments of the Confucians.

  - The "Fu on the Two Capitals" is equally laden with suggestions about how the Han ought to be ruled. It glorifies and endorses a major policy decision—moving the capital from the uncouth and militarized west into the cultured and Confucian east.



Ban Gu's carved history of the Han dynasty

BAN CHAO

- The policy retreat from an interventionist approach and the physical retreat from west to east—policies that Ban Gu endorsed—created some major strategic challenges for the Eastern Han. The man who did the most to overcome those challenges was none other than Ban Gu's twin brother, the soldier Ban Chao.

- During the Qin and early Han periods, the nomad-warriors known collectively as the Xiongnu were a powerful and threatening presence along the empire's central Asian frontiers. Emperor Han Wudi attempted to deal a decisive blow to the Xiongnu and extend Chinese power further into the Tarim Basin.

- Those campaigns had mixed results. In the 1st century CE, the Xiongnu were divided and significantly weakened. The southern Xiongnu had become allies and dependents of the Han while the northern Xiongnu remained hostile. The political chaos of the short-lived Xin usurpation, followed by the Han restoration, enabled several western tribes to expand and challenge Han hegemony. But by the 70s, the Han dynasty was ready to strike back.

- Ban Chao took command of Han forces in the Tarim Basin in 73 CE. He remained there for the next 30 years. When it came to dealing with the troublesome northern Xiongnu, Ban Chao cultivated—or bought—allies among the frontier tribes and relied increasingly on a small Chinese expeditionary army bulked up with nomad mercenaries.

- Sadly, at nearly the same time as Ban Chao's greatest achievements, Ban Gu fell out of favor at court and died in prison.

- Ban Chao's strategy of allying with frontier tribes and advancing with a small expeditionary army was a remarkable success in the near term, but it was built on shaky foundations.

  - Central Asians were beginning to outnumber native Chinese in Guanzhong deep inside the empire. And maintaining the delicate balance of manipulation, money, and military might that Ban Chao had pulled off in the Tarim Basin required a successor who was up to the task.

  - After Ban Chao's death in 102, that task fell to his son, Ban Yong, who managed to keep the western regions under a modicum of Han control. But after he was recalled in the 120s, control evaporated.

- An aside: Ban Chao's frontier strategy and expeditionary forays contributed to the development of what we know as the Silk Road. In other words, this great trade network was, in part, the unintentional consequence of a series of defense contracts. Ban Chao, in his three decades in Central Asia, did a great deal to enhance the power and prestige of the Han dynasty.

BAN ZHAO

- Ban Zhao was a remarkable person who made a significant impact on Chinese culture and society. Ban Zhao married young, at age 14. It was a strategic marriage, arranged to build alliances between great clans. If she ever met the groom before the wedding, it would have been a brief encounter.

- Ban Zhao started on the lowest rung in her new home, as the young bride to a young son. She wrote extensively on how a young wife could—and should—assiduously court the favor of her new in-laws, especially her mother-in-law.

- Ban Zhao bore several children, including at least one son whose arrival as a male heir increased her stock within the husband's family. But her husband died young.

- The death of a husband presented most wives with a stark choice: remarry and abandon her children to her husband's family, or stay with her children and remain the perpetually chaste and loyal widow.

- Ban Zhao's wealth allowed her to chart a course between these extremes. She never remarried and was devoted to her children. But she was never a prisoner in her late husband's home. She traveled, wrote, and socialized within the highest circles of the Han elite.

- By her mid-50s, she was a celebrated writer. Her talents brought her powerful connections within the imperial clan. Besides her scholarly and poetic contributions, Ban Zhao is best known for a treatise she wrote called the *Nu Jie*, or *Admonitions for Women.*

- At first glance, the *Admonitions* will strike a modern audience as deeply sexist. It offers a series of injunctions to keep women subservient to men. At one point, she writes, "Let a woman modestly yield to others."

- But we should ask ourselves: Is Ban Zhao trying to keep women in their place? Or, is she creating a way for women to legitimize—and to guide—the power that women could and did wield during the Han?

- Among Ban Zhao's admonitions, this one stands out:

> The "gentlemen" of the present age think only of controlling their wives. They think only of teaching their sons to read books and study history. This ignores the essential relation between men and women and it is not in accord with the teaching of the sages.

- In other words, she's saying, if we fail to educate women, we'll create a fundamentally unbalanced society.

- When Ban Zhao's brother, Ban Gu, died in prison, she dedicated her considerable talents to revising and finishing his epic history. By the late 90s, she was a fixture at the imperial court in Luoyang: engaging in scholarly debates, advising the empress, educating the women of the imperial household—and, perhaps, some of the young men. She also composed rhapsodies at the emperor's request.

- She remained a trusted adviser to the imperial family until her death in 116. The emperor and empress themselves observed a period of mourning for this elegant and eloquent individual.

SUGGESTED READING

Goldin, *The Culture of Sex in Ancient China*.
Hinsch, *Women in Early Imperial China*.
Lewis, *The Early Chinese Empires*.
Pan, *Courtier and Commoner in Ancient China*.
Swann, *Food and Money in Ancient China*.
Wills, "Ban Zhao."

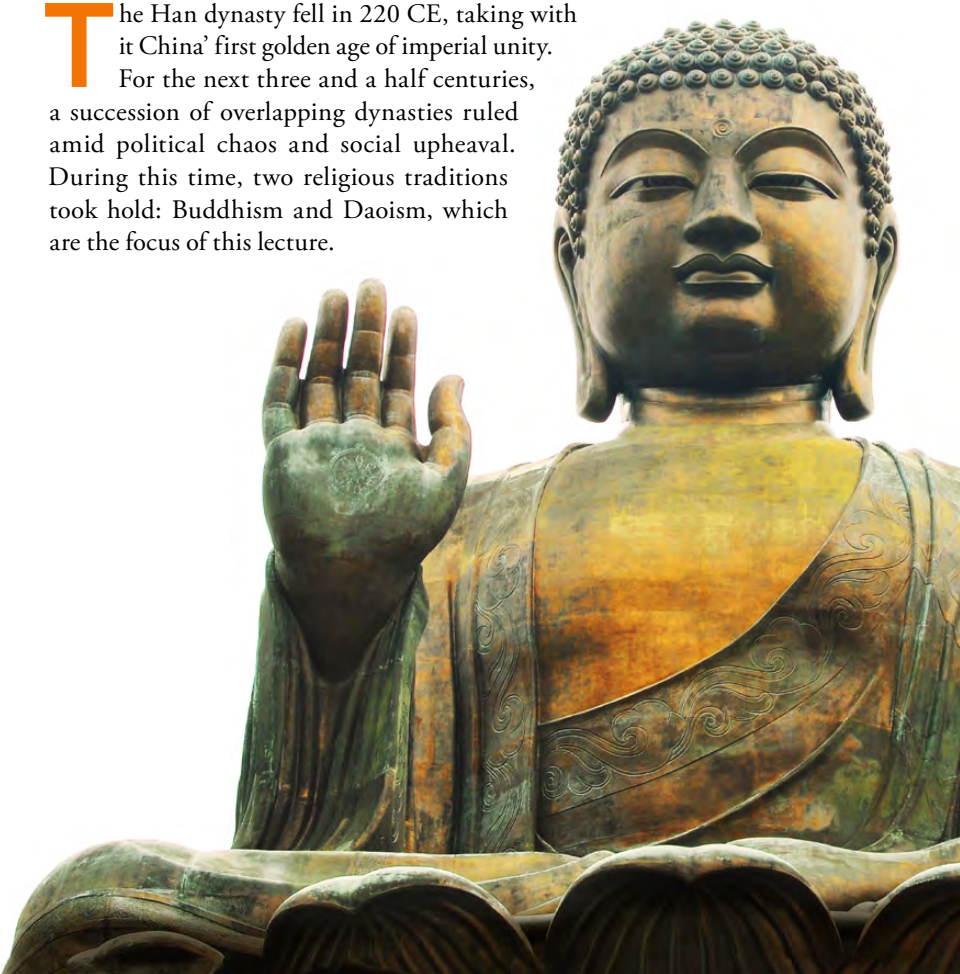
QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What is the significance of Ban Gu's "Fu on the Two Capitals?"
- Why was the writing of history so politicized in the Han dynasty?
- Why was the Han so concerned about its Western frontiers? How might the Silk Road have impacted the daily lives of people living in the Eastern Han period?
- What do Ban Zhao's exhortations to women reveal about the role of women—real and ideal—in Han state and society?

Lecture 5

CHINA'S BUDDHIST MONKS AND DAOIST RECLUSES

The Han dynasty fell in 220 CE, taking with it China' first golden age of imperial unity. For the next three and a half centuries, a succession of overlapping dynasties ruled amid political chaos and social upheaval. During this time, two religious traditions took hold: Buddhism and Daoism, which are the focus of this lecture.



BUDDHISM'S BACKGROUND

- Buddhism is the most significant foreign idea ever imported into China. Buddhist monks and Buddhist sutras had been in China since the 1st century CE. Garrisons out along the Central Asian trade routes had facilitated cross-cultural flows between China and India. Indian monks who traveled to China learned to speak and write Chinese, and they explained Buddhist teachings to a curious Chinese audience.

- Buddhism got its first toehold in north and northwest China. It appealed to the foreign merchants and warriors who had relocated there from Central Asia and beyond. But once translated into Chinese, Sanskrit sutras attracted an even wider audience and began to spread south.

- Buddhism—by proclaiming that life was suffering, and that desire was the cause of all suffering—addressed the chaos and misery that marked the daily lives of many Chinese in this period. Buddhism also gained official sanction. Government money founded great monasteries and libraries, and bankrolled pilgrimages to India and massive translation projects.

- One of the Sixteen Kingdoms that ruled China in the late 4th century—somewhat confusingly, known as the Former Qin—was an important point of connection between China, Central Asia, and the world beyond. The Former Qin were so eager for Buddhist expertise that they invaded Central Asia to bring back a single expert on dharma, the monk Kumarajiva, from the oasis city of Kucha.

- Delivered to Chang'an, Kumarajiva directed thousands of monks in a monumental translation project. The thirst for Dharma—or Buddhist teachings—seemed unquenchable.

- A subsequent northern dynasty known as the Northern Wei eventually supplanted the Former Qin. The Northern Wei were major patrons of Buddhism. They made the faith their official religion and sponsored the construction of the beautiful grottoes at Yungang, which is in modern-day Shanxi province.

BEING A BUDDHIST

- One way to live as a Buddhist is as a layperson, sponsoring good works and trying to align oneself with the teachings of the Buddha. But if one were to pursue the monastic life, it would require supreme dedication. To become a monk, one must abandon all ties to their family and renounce their given name.

- To enter the sangha, the community of monks, one accepts the most extreme forms of self-denial and social separation. This means disavowing productive work and all but the most modest material possessions. One must also take the vow of celibacy, another break from mainstream society, and shave their head: a symbolic renunciation of ego and vanity.

- Being a monk in early imperial China couldn't have been easy. But there were rewards, such as spiritual well-being and, potentially, nirvana. *Nirvana* is a Sanskrit word meaning "to extinguish"; in this context, it means extinguishing the soul and ending the cycle of reincarnation and inevitable suffering that comes with it.

- There was also a place for women in the sangha. Buddhist nunneries offered a refuge for Chinese women, especially widows. These nunneries were a path to enlightenment, and an escape from the confines of male-dominated households.

- Buddhism identifies four noble truths: the truth of suffering; the truth of the cause of suffering, desire; the truth of the end of suffering, renouncing desire; and the truth of the path that leads to nirvana—the end of suffering. It also encompassed three treasures, the *sanbao*:

    1. The Buddha, the first to attain Nirvana and the first source of enlightenment.
    2. The dharma, the teachings of the Buddha.
    3. The sangha, the community of monks and nuns who embrace the Buddha and the dharma.

FAXIAN

Chinese Buddhist monk Faxian at the ruins of Ashoka's palace

- Chinese Buddhism in early times was at the margins of the dharma. According to the monk Faxian, who lived in the 4th and 5th centuries CE, the laws governing the Chinese sangha were "mutilated and imperfect." Faxian set out in search of the dharma at its source, in India.

- In 399 CE, Faxian and a group of companions set out from Chang'an. He was probably in his early 60s. After a lengthy sojourn at Dunhuang, a city of immense strategic and religious importance, these pilgrims began a perilous trek across the Central Asian deserts.

- Much of what Faxian records in his journals concerns how life is properly and faithfully lived in the lands where the dharma is understood and followed. This reversed the conventional view of China as the superior civilization.

- Faxian eventually found the dharma flourishing in India, not least because the imprint of the historical Buddha, Siddharta Gautama, was everywhere. In 414, Faxian finally returned to China. The account of his 15-year pilgrimage was a sensation and found a receptive audience among the Chinese clergy and among the wealthy lay community curious about the homeland and the true teachings of the Buddha. Many thousands of Chinese pilgrims would follow his example in the centuries that followed.

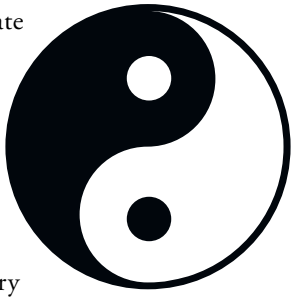
DAOISM

- Buddhism's growth as a religious institution in China inspired a complementary and competing codification of native beliefs and practices called Daoism. Like Buddhism, Daoism encourages adherents to seek enlightenment and inspiration outside the mores of society.

- Daoism aspires to harmonize human life with the Dao—the organic nature of the universe. There are two foundational texts of Daoism. The first is the *Daodejing*, also known as the *Classic of the Way of Power*, which is attributed to Laozi, a semi-legendary philosopher of the 6th century BCE. The second is the eponymous *Zhuangzi*, which contains the teachings of Master Zhuang, who lived at the turn of the 4th to 3rd centuries.

The birth of Laozi, the founder of Taoism

- A related text, the *Yijing*, or *Book of Changes*, offered ways for the early students of Laozi and Zhuangzi to plumb the natural order. Daoism's textual foundations predate China's imperial unification in the 3rd century BCE, but religious Daoism only really coalesced in the 3rd to the 5th centuries CE, a period of political disunity.



- There was an intense appetite for both Buddhist and Daoist texts that began during the Three Kingdoms Period of the 3rd century and accelerated during the era of the Northern and Southern dynasties, which ran from roughly 316 to 589 CE.

  - When the Han Dynasty fell in 220 CE, there wasn't a complete systemic collapse. Instead, the Han domain was divided into three large states ruled by veteran military commanders and statesmen of the Han.

  - For a brief moment in the 280s, unity was restored by a dynasty called the Jin, but the Jin triumph did not endure. Dynastic unity was sundered by a bloody succession struggle.

  - After the Jin unification fell apart in the early 4th century, a coalition of five nomad peoples from the north and northwest invaded China and sacked both Luoyang and Chang'an. This marks the beginning of the Northern and Southern dynasties, roughly dividing the Yellow River watershed. Over the course of nearly 300 years, North China was home to nearly 20 different states, while the south was ruled by a succession of five dynasties.

- The Northern dynasties facilitated the influx of trade and foreign belief systems, especially Buddhism. Meanwhile, the children of those wealthy magnate families who did not find their way into government service funneled their interests and creativity into an emerging culture of literary, philosophical, alchemical, scientific, and metaphysical exploration.

- Xu Mi and Xu Hui, a father-and-son team of Daoist mystics, helped fill this need for metaphysical exploration during the late 4th and early 5th centuries. The Xus claimed to be in communication with the Heaven of the Supreme Clarity. Their received texts, known collectively as the Maoshan revelations—after the Xu family retreat on Mount Mao—brilliantly synthesized the philosophies of early Daoist masters with the indigenous belief systems of the magnate families of the lower Yangtze valley.

- Elite buy-in marked the Maoshan revelations as a major turning point in Daoism's evolution from a loose constellation of ancient texts to something approaching an organized religion.

- The most iconic Daoist pursuit—made iconic by its literati practitioners—was the rustic and natural life. If you had been a scholar-official in the 4th or 5th centuries, you might have been drawn to a life of genteel poverty. An example is the self-denying gentleman farmer who exults in the simple life, and who feels himself more in touch with nature—and more in touch with the simple peasant—than the effete courtiers who compete for office and prestige.

- Embracing Daoism also made it easier to rationalize the rise and fall of dynasties. When an individual is not personally invested in an artificial political order, it's easier to justify why dynasties rise and fall—and yet the cultured magnate families endure.

- Daoism had huge cultural impact. Art—especially painting and poetry—was a way to transcend the artificial world. That brings us to China's first great poet and exemplar of the rustic recluse: Tao Yuanming. Tao almost singlehandedly created an entire genre of poetry as well as a lifestyle genre.

- As with Buddhism, there were many ways to live a Daoist life. You could go to the extreme and emulate famous hermits who abandoned all the trappings of human civilization in pursuit of the Dao. You could also be a part-time Daoist—work during the week but, on weekends and holidays, stroll in the hills or lounge drunkenly in a rustic hut in your garden.

Tao Yuanming

- Tao Yuanming fell between those two extremes. He turned his back on public service but stayed in the world of men. He worked his farm, where the world of men and nature overlap.

- The phrase in Chinese that translates as nature or natural is *ziran*, literally meaning "so of itself." This is a core concept of Daoism that Tao sought to express in his unaffected style of poetry:

I pluck chrysanthemums by the eastern fence

And see the distant southern mountains

The mountain air is fresh as dusk

Flying birds return in flocks.

In these things there lies as great truth,

But when I try to express it, I cannot find the words.

- Tao seemed content to be aware of the Dao, the great truth, without plumbing its depths. Because it liberates us from social constraint, these pursuits were facilitated by copious quantities of liquor. In his autobiography, Tao referred to himself as follows:

He has a special weakness for wine, but cannot always afford it.

His friends knowing this, often invite him to drink.

- There's a paradox involving farming and Daoism. As much as farming is about being in tune with nature, the farmer is often at war with nature.

- In the lean years, the life of a farmer is one of uncertainty, hardship, and poverty, Tao acknowledges. Man needs food and clothing to live, and wine and companionship to enjoy life. Tao also infers that while life as a reclusive farmer-poet—one who is trying to describe the indescribable—might not be perfectly in accord with the Dao, it's better than the alternatives.

- As a result, Tao was critical of those who distance themselves from the Dao and scratch and claw for power and prestige in the world of men. He's equally skeptical of those who cleave too close to the Dao, especially those who mistakenly think that they can cheat nature and achieve immortality.

SUGGESTED READING

Kleeman, *Celestial Masters*.
Lewis, *China Between Empires*.
Mollier, *Buddhism and Taoism Face to Face*.
Pregadio, *Great Clarity*.
Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Why did Buddhism and Daoism find a receptive audience in China at this time? Why did Buddhism enjoy the patronage of the Northern dynasties?

- How did the introduction of a foreign religion like Buddhism impact the formation of an indigenous belief system, like religious Daoism?

- How might the spread of Buddhism and religious Daoism affect the daily lives of people living during the period of division?

- Why would a life of rustic retreat appeal to someone like Tao Yuanming?

Lecture 6

COSMOPOLITAN CHANG'AN: TANG DYNASTY CAPITAL

The Tang dynasty (from 618 to 907 CE) is considered the pinnacle of Chinese civilization. And its capital, Chang'an—whose name means "perpetual peace"—embodied all that was great about the glorious Tang era. Rising at the eastern terminus of the Silk Road, in modern-day Shaanxi province, Chang'an's elegant symmetry and epic architecture inspired imperial cities across Asia, including Seoul, Kyoto, Nara, and Hue. It was the greatest city on earth.

RISE OF CHANG'AN

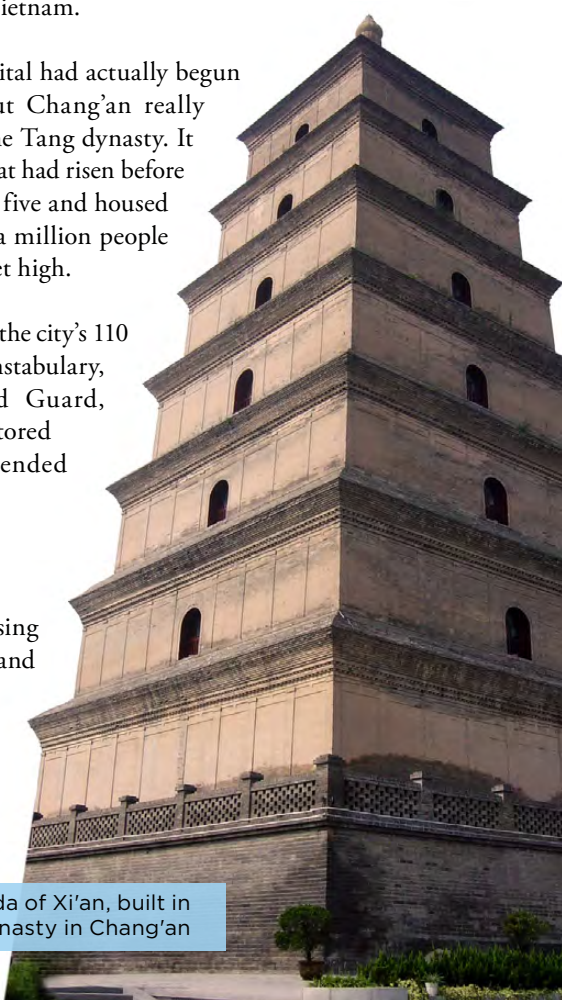
- Shortly before Chang'an's prime, the short-lived Sui dynasty—from 589 to 617—was toppled by one of its generals, Li Yuan. The general declared the existence of a new dynasty, the Tang, which would last for the next 300 years.

- Under the general—and his ruthless son, Li Shimin—the Tang rapidly consolidated an empire that stretched from the oases of Central Asia to the East China Sea and from the steppes of modern Mongolia to the borders present-day Vietnam.

- Work on a new imperial capital had actually begun during the Sui period. But Chang'an really came into its own during the Tang dynasty. It dwarfed all imperial cities that had risen before it. It measuring six miles by five and housed a population of more than a million people within walls that were 18 feet high.

- A headman governed each of the city's 110 wards. And the imperial constabulary, known as the Gold Bird Guard, enforced the curfew, monitored city traffic, and apprehended delinquents.

- Inside this megacity, more than a dozen great wooden gates opened onto crisscrossing boulevards, to the suburbs, and to agricultural districts outside. These gates controlled the entry and exit of residents, opening at dawn and closing at dusk.



The Giant Wild Goose Pagoda of Xi'an, built in 652 CE during the Tang dynasty in Chang'an

CHANG'AN'S GOLDEN AGE

- Emperor Xuanzong's rule, from 712 to 756, is widely considered the golden age of the Tang—and the golden age of Chang'an. Chang'an was, first and foremost, a seat of governance. It was dominated by imperial palaces and the offices of the six ministries: the Ministry of Personnel, the Ministry of Rites, the Ministry of Public Works, the Ministry of Revenue, the Ministry of Punishments, and the Ministry of the Armed Forces.

- Some of these official buildings were truly immense. There was also housing for visiting provincial officials, military training grounds, imperial academies. and libraries.

- Chang'an's official buildings were rivaled by its religious architecture. The city was home to hundreds of Buddhist and Daoist temples as well as to Zoroastrian temples and Nestorian churches. One Daoist abbey had a library of more than 50,000 scrolls.

SOCIETY

- Tang society was rigidly hierarchical, with laws dictating the dress, the housing, and the transportation that could be used by each stratum. At the top of the social pyramid was the imperial clan, followed closely by the aristocratic lineages that dominated the top rungs of the bureaucracy and the military. Functionaries and scribes handled the everyday operations of the government.

- The Daoist and Buddhist clergy were a social class unto themselves, most of them poor, but some fabulously wealthy and powerful. Below them were the vast sea of commoners, peasants, and laborers, and, below them, artisans, merchants and slaves.

- Tang China was also home to tens of thousands—if not hundreds of thousands—of foreigners. They tended to be segregated and organized under their own self-governing headman system.

- The prestige and legitimacy of a dynasty could also be measured by its gravitational pull on the wider world. Much of the great art of the era was dedicated to portraying emperors receiving gifts and emissaries from the far corners of the known world.

The Leshan Giant Buddha statue

LAYOUT

- In Chang'an, imperial palaces sat to the north, inside the city wall. Behind them were the great parks, where the imperial clan would spend their leisure time. To the east of the emperor's residence was the equally grand home of the empire's second most important person, the heir-apparent.

Figure of a civil official

- Directly south of the main palaces was the administrative city, home to government offices, the emperor's ancestral temple, and, most crucially, the altars of soil and grain. This was where the emperor acted as intermediary with the divine, sacrificing to heaven on behalf of his subjects.

- Just in front of the official districts was Chang'an's most magnificent boulevard, Hengjie, which was almost 700 feet wide and ran west to east for six miles. It divided the city in two.

- Most of Chang'an's elite—including the aristocratic lineages and government officials—preferred to site their mansions in the more fashionable wards, on the east and northeast side of the city. The western side of the city was more crowded and chaotic.

- Between the mansions of the aristocracy and offices of the bureaucracy and military was an area known as the North Hamlet. This was Chang'an's high-rent pleasure district, where female and male companionship could be had for the right price.

MARKETS

- On the city's upper east side was the Eastern Market. It covered about 466 acres, divided into nine sectors by four avenues. Within those nine sectors, there were some 220 lanes, each one dedicated to a category of goods. Examples include a leather goods lane, a gold and silver lane, and an apothecary lane.

- Given its proximity to the posher neighborhoods of Chang'an, the goods at the Eastern Market were generally better and more expensive than at the Western Market. Luxurious silks, fine wines, exquisitely made musical instruments—along with the pick of the field, stream, and forest.

- The Eastern Market was also strategically located for the sale of luxury goods imported by sea and transported up the Grand Canal to that side of Chang'an. These included fresh fish and shellfish from the coasts and exquisite cabinetry and bronze mirrors from Yangzhou.

- People used traditional copper cash—round coins with square holes through the middle— as walking-around money. But silk was the commodity of choice for big-ticket purchases in the Tang; it's valuable, durable, and a lot lighter than silver or gold.

- If you had to move a lot of money, you could go the gold and silver lane, deposit your bullion, and then write promissory notes against those deposits. Private and official credit instruments could be redeemed even outside the capital in the empire's larger cities.

- You might need one of those notes to buy something truly exciting, like a golden peach from the oasis of Samarkand. The ruler of Samarkand, in modern Uzbekistan, once sent the Tang emperor a gift of fancy yellow peaches, which were said to be as large as goose eggs and a color like gold.

- The story of these peaches took the capital by storm. Here was something truly exotic, and meant solely for the emperor's table. And so, if a few of these peaches did make it into the hands a grocer in the Eastern Market, you'd have to weigh the risk of buying one.

- Tang China had strict sumptuary laws, governing what the various classes were allowed to wear and to eat. Even if you could afford a black-market golden peach from Samarkand, you might be courting the death penalty.

- Executions took place across town at the public execution grounds of the decidedly grittier Western Market. The Western Market had the same layout as the Eastern Market. It was fed by a canal that imported bulk commodities like timber, salt, and charcoal.

- Besides bulk goods, the Western Market specialized in items of generally lower price and quality. Whereas the Eastern Market boasted polychrome silks that adorned the wealthy, the textiles in the Western Market were the coarse, white hemp tunics and trousers worn by commoners. Its moneylenders were more akin to loan sharks than the gold merchants of the Eastern Market, with their sophisticated credit instruments.

- There were many beggars and panhandlers who frequented soup kitchens and poorhouses sponsored by Buddhist clergy. One Buddhist charity had a particularly ingenious fundraising scheme. For a few coppers, you could buy a live fish and release it into a pond, reaping good karma. Then, after the market closed, the monks would scoop up all the fish and sell them anew the next day.

- Persians and Sogdians were present in the Western Market. Persian was the language of the sea trade, which followed the monsoons. Traders sailed southwest from China on the winter monsoon and northeast from the Indian Ocean in spring. Sogdian was the language of the caravan routes of central Asia. These caravans relied on the indomitable Bactrian camel.

- The Western Market contained lots of entertainers: singers, jugglers, sword swallowers, and storytellers. A particularly popular form of storytelling was Buddhist salvation tales. These were often rendered as plays, but they also came in a much more mobile form: the picture scroll.

- One relates the tale of Mulian rescuing his mother from the underworld. On one side is the written story. On the reverse is the graphic element: a painting of Mulian's journey through various Buddhist hells, with their demons and suffering sinners. As the storyteller reads, he unwinds the scroll revealing more of Mulian's quest. It's a morality tale, about a filial son who saves his less-than-perfect mother, and it's full of lurid detail.

Mulian and Madame Liu

- Equally lurid were the public executions carried out under a solitary willow tree. These gruesome spectacles drew large crowds. Some involved a reading of the charges. And executions might have been a chance for a commoner to see a member of the aristocracy brought low by venality and corruption.

- The two primary forms of capital punishment were strangulation and decapitation. Strangulation was slower and more painful but viewed as less punitive, as it kept the body intact. Decapitation was reserved for the most heinous crimes. Corpses and heads were left on display as a warning.

- In the Western Market, the Tang legal system was on display. And we can get a sense of the dynasty's obsession with order and symmetry in the market's formal grid. But the Western Market was also a hotbed of illegality and disorder; it was notorious for its gangs of idle and lawless young men.

- It also attracted knights-errant: a strange group of noble vigilantes to whom one might plead to right a wrong that had fallen through the cracks of the Tang justice system. The great Tang poet Li Bai fancied himself one of these knights errant.

- Even more notorious were the Western Market's paid-assassins—the butchers. These men were butchers by day who moonlighted killing their fellow man. Why were butchers attracted to this profession? Facility with the blade was one factor, and while medieval Chinese people loved their meat, they reviled the men who butchered it.

Tang tomb figure

- From a Buddhist perspective, a butcher's karma was virtually irredeemable; they had nothing to lose. After killing so many animals, killing a few people wouldn't change your fate, so the reasoning went. As much as the Tang founders wanted Chang'an to be a model of order and imperial power, its own markets exposed the limits of that order.

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Benn, *China's Golden Age*.
Lewis, *China's Cosmopolitan Empire*.
Schaefer, *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand*.
Tackett, *The Destruction of the Medieval Chinese Aristocracy*.
Xiong, *Sui-Tang Chang'an (583–904)*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What explains the desire for exotica in Tang China?
- Why was the Tang dynasty so concerned with regulating the Eastern and Western Markets?
- In what ways did the urban landscape and social dynamics of Chang'an reflect the cosmopolitan character of the Tang? How was that cosmopolitanism reflected in the Eastern and Western Markets?
- Why did Chang'an prove unsustainable as an imperial capital?

Lecture 7

CHINA'S GRAND CANAL: LIFELINE OF AN EMPIRE

Over the course of China's imperial history, perhaps the most important tasks for dynasties were the construction and maintenance of infrastructure—the roads and canals that knit this vast empire together. None was more important or problematic than the Grand Canal, which is among the largest public works projects in human history and a vital economic lifeline even today.

THE CANAL

- The original Grand Canal was the brainchild of Emperors Wen and Yang of the short-lived Sui dynasty (circa 589 to 618). They undertook a massive project of expanding and extending a canal system that linked the North China Plain to the Yangtze valley. As the world's largest man-made waterway, the Grand Canal would serve as a means of integrating imperial China. But it would also be a great source of disruption and disintegration.

- Emperor Wen chose Chang'an—the capital of the earlier Qin and Western Han dynasties—as his capital. It would become the medieval world's greatest city. But Chang'an was a problematic choice for capital.

- The city had excellent connectivity to the land routes to central Asia and to China's southwest, but it was less well connected to the Yellow River flood plain to the east and almost completely cut off from the south and southeast, especially from the flourishing Yangtze River valley.

Emperor Wen of Sui

- To solve that problem, Emperor Wen expanded a canal originally dug during the Han dynasty in the 2nd century BCE. It stretched 100 miles east from Chang'an to the Yellow River.

- Emperor Wen started a second huge imperial city at Luoyang, which had been the capital of the Eastern Han. He then accelerated canal projects to link his twin capitals to the Yangtze River to the south and north as far as modern Beijing. The logic of the Grand Canal was simple. China's two great rivers—the Yellow and the Yangtze—run east to west. North-south canals connect those two rivers and the millions of people that live along them.

- Throughout its history, the Grand Canal was big government in action. Many of the barges that plied these waterways were owned by the government and crewed by soldiers and later hereditary boatmen.

- Initially, the canal was supposed to pay for itself. Operating expenses were collected as transit fees and upkeep was to be done by corvée labor, or the 20 or 30 days a year of free labor the average farmer owed the government. It sounds good in theory.

- But keeping the canal in working order was an expensive and complex proposition, and decentralized fee collection and labor conscription were both rife with corruption and inadequate to the needs of maintenance. Canal maintenance became an obsession of dynasties for the next 1400 years. One reason for that was the indispensable commodities shipped by canal, which included grain, salt, silk, tea, and timber.

- It wasn't just north and south that the Grand Canal connected. With its southern terminus at the seaport of Hangzhou, the waterway connected inland regions to the trade networks of East Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Indian Ocean.

- By the 8th century, there were Arabs and Persians living on China's southeast coast and in Chang'an and Luoyang, and Korean merchant enclaves in the northeast and along the Grand Canal. In the 13th century, they were joined by Hindus, Genoese, and Venetians.

- The points where the canal connected to China's lakes and rivers—Hangzhou, Suzhou, and Yangzhou—would become some of the wealthiest and most cosmopolitan cities in the world.

- The Grand Canal also moved people. Officials moved easily from one assignment to the next. The route was also used for imperial inspection tours, which were both grand demonstrations of imperial power and a source of valuable intelligence for the emperor. Partly because of the Grand Canal, the scholar-elite of south China, a group called the literati, came to dominate the imperial bureaucracy in the second millennium.

CONSTRUCTION

- The Sui dynasty's waterways began by connecting and expanding existing canals. This immense undertaking was indicative of the manpower China's dynasties could mobilize. Six million peasants are said to have been dragooned during the first decade of the 7th century. That's an exaggeration, but not an over-the-top one.

- The Sui did with canals what the earlier Qin dynasty had done with Imperial roads, and the results were similar. Mass conscription of labor and imperial overreach fired disaffection among the elites and provoked peasant rebellions.

- The Qin dynasty was toppled after 15 years and the Sui dynasty after 37. And yet, like the Qin's roads, the Sui's canals proved essential to the extended period of imperial unity that followed under the Tang dynasty, dates 618–907.

- The Grand Canal also required advanced surveying and sophisticated hydraulic engineering. To widen and deepen existing waterways, the water had to be stopped or diverted by dams and temporary canals. In smaller works, cofferdams—consisting of straw mats caked with mud—were boomed into place. Big canals required more substantial diversions.

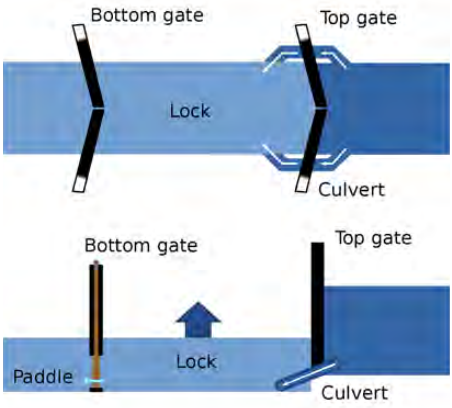
- As a channel was dredged, widened, and straightened, dirt and stone were piled as berms on each side. The berms were topped with paths along which draft animals towed barges. Periodically, spurs were dug along the flanks of a canal to feed and drain water or to irrigate surrounding fields.

- The early Grand Canal had 24 major locks. Locks are transition points between different water levels. The 7th century Grand Canal featured flash locks--basically a dam that holds back the downstream flow. When enough downstream traffic is queued up, the dam is opened, and the traffic shoots the lock.

- To get upstream, larger vessels had to be winched or towed through the open lock. Smaller craft could be dragged up or down the side of the lock on a dry double slipway. All of this was expensive and labor intensive. A major flash-lock/slipway facility required a labor force of 500 men and a significant outlay of cash.

- During the Song dynasty—dating 960 to 1279—a hydraulic engineer named Qiao Weiyo invented the pound lock. There are gates at each end, and the water is let in our out depending on the direction of traffic. Pound locks sped transit and made it possible to extend the Grand Canal across Shandong province to modern Beijing.

- Pound locks increased capacity. The biggest ships that could make it through flash locks were about 15 tons. Pound locks could accommodate ships carrying 100 tons of grain. Between the locks, barges could cover up to 45 miles a day. During the Tang dynasty, cargoes from the Yangtze Delta reached Chang'an in three to four weeks.



Basic diagram of canal lock gates

- Ennin, a Japanese monk who visited China in the late 9th century, marveled at its canals. He described flotillas of 30 to 40 barges pulled upstream by a single pair of water-buffalo.

- The canal became essential to supplying grain to officials in Beijing. This required intense management: Grain brought in from the sea was vulnerable to storms, while the canal was vulnerable to silting or flooding.

- Transporting this tribute grain became a major policy issue in imperial China. And because it was essential for the political health and economic well-being of dynasties, poor management of the canal became a sign of imperial decline, whereas active maintenance and improvements were symbols of imperial vigor.

ENDURANCE AND PROBLEMS

- The Grand Canal endured even in times of territorial division. For example, civil war in the 14th century disrupted and damaged China's canals, but they were quickly repaired under the Ming dynasty, which dated from 1368 to 1644.

- The canal project sponsored by the Ming emperor Yongle in the early 1400s added 15 new locks in Shandong province. The imperial transport fleet would now grow to number 15,000 barges and employ 160,000 crew.

Emperor Chengzu of the Ming dynasty

- The Grand Canal, however, was not entirely a boon. It was expensive to maintain, vulnerable to the elements, and an economic, political, and strategic vulnerability. When China was united and vigorous—as it was during the early years of dynasties like the Tang, Song, Ming, and Qing—the canal was in good repair and prosperous

- But when imperial China was weak and divided, as it was for much of the 14th and 17th centuries, the canal system became sclerotic and a source of political and social upheaval.

- During the 15th century, several dikes on the Yellow River collapsed, devastating the canals and locks, silting up channels, and limiting water supplies to the upper elevations. It took decades to repair the damage, and even then, the repairs were only temporary.

- The faltering Ming dynasty fell to a lethal combination of peasant rebellion and foreign invasion in 1644. The Manchu rulers of the Qing dynasty—dates 1644 to 1911—took an intense interest in the Grand Canal.

- Because the health of the canal became emblematic of dynastic legitimacy, there are several examples of Qing emperors taking personal charge over a canal crisis. The Qing's obsession with the canal turned into an expensive trap.

- In the face of man-made disasters, like the bloody Taiping Rebellion of the 1850s and 1860s, and catastrophic shifts in the course of the Yellow River, as happened in 1854 and in 1887, the canal route had to be abandoned. That was in 1901, a decade before China's last emperor abdicated.

THE GUILD

- Despite its problems, the transport of the tribute grain by the canal persisted because of a potent lobby. The thousands of officials who staffed the grain transport system were invested in its survival. Merchants were also vocal advocates.

- The one group most heavily invested in the canal—and a source of much of its infamy—were the boatmen of the grain-tribute fleet. Initially, these were drawn from the military, but they were later organized into hereditary households settled on imperial lands.

- Each generation of boatmen was allotted food and other expenses for the seasonal barge transit and an annual stipend of grain and silver. They could also transport their own trade goods onboard government barges.

- By the Qing dynasty in the 17th and 18th centuries, corrupt officials had illegally sold off most of the land grants, and the bulk of the grain transport fleet was manned by itinerant laborers. Sitting idle and unpaid for months at a time, the boatmen established their own mutual aid societies that helped the impoverished, the sick and injured, and the old and infirm among their ranks. These societies, in turn, evolved into a powerful guild.

- The boatmen's guild developed an ominous reputation. A lot of this had to do with their adoption of a form of Buddhism known as *Luozujiao*, which focuses on the teaching of a man named Luo.

- Luo was a boatman himself, who crafted a doctrine of devotion and salvation that appealed to the poor and dispossessed. The boatmen's guild evolved into a self-financing counterweight to government authority.

- Most emperors and officials viewed the boatmen as a necessary evil. But the boatmen's guild became so threatening that Qianlong—a Qing emperor of the 18th century—banned the guild, and had its halls and temples demolished.

- That just drove the movement underground. They were virtually impossible to uproot from the grain-tribute apparatus. If anything, official attempts to dismantle the boatmen's guild only destabilized the Grand Canal system and rendered the grain tribute even more vulnerable.

- After the Luo sect was outlawed as a source of heresy and rebellion, the boatmen's guild became one of late imperial China's most notorious secret societies—famous for its smuggling, extortion, and its protection rackets.

- Even after the grain tribute was suspended at the beginning of the 20th century, the guild morphed into the Green Gang—Shanghai's most powerful and violent criminal syndicate of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. There are criminal syndicates active today that trace their origins back to the boatmen's guild.

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Ebrey, *Cambridge Illustrated History of China*.
Lewis, *China's Cosmopolitan Empire*.
Needham, *Science and Civilization in China*.
UNESCO, "The Grand Canal." http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1443

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- How did the Grand Canal enable imperial unity and at the same time enable cultural diversity? Why was the grain tribute so important to the imperial government?

- How did the Grand Canal help to overcome the geographic and logistical challenges of the Chinese empire?

- What kinds of people might you encounter at one of the locks along the Grand Canal?

- Why were the bargemen of the Grand Canal so potentially destabilizing?

Lecture 8

TRIUMPH AND TRAGEDY IN TANG POETRY

Li Bai

Li Bai, challenging others to drink

Creates one hundred verses

Sleeping in the bars of Chang'an

Even if called to board the imperial barge

He does not oblige.

Styling himself the Drunken Immortal

- That's how the Tang dynasty poet Du Fu sized up a famous contemporary in the 8th century. The glittering court life aboard the emperor's pleasure barge is contrasted with the drunken poet Li Bai passed out in one of the countless taverns of Chang'an, the ancient capital city in modern-day Shaanxi province.

- The 740s and 750s were China's golden age—a peak of wealth, power, and cultural achievement. The ruling Tang dynasty became a model for Asian civilization. Japan, Korea, and Vietnam all borrowed from the Tang legal system, its art, and its architecture.

- The Tang dynasty reigned from 618 to 907 CE and was an ethnic and cultural blend of China and Central Asia. The imperial family, the Li clan, were warriors descended from Turkic nomads. And Tang aristocrats shared an obsession with horses and polo—a sport played by men and women.

- The Tang dynasty was aristocratic but it was also remarkably inclusive. The imperial court employed a combination of Chinese and Central Asian officials and they accommodated multiple cultural forms and belief systems. For instance, the Tang promoted three very different schools called the three teachings:

  1. Confucianism, with its emphasis on hierarchy, service and morality.

  2. Daoism, with its naturalist escapism.

  3. Buddhism, a foreign religion with a doctrine of impermanence and the renunciation of material desire.

POETRY

- During the Tang, poetry possessed an evolving role. The leading genre in the early Tang era was a form known as court poetry. Early Tang rulers wanted things highly centralized—politically, economically, and culturally—and that included poetry. Court poetry was therefore formal in topic and style, reserved for a courtly audience, and involving courtly topics. It was inseparable from official life, and was added to the imperial exam curriculum in 680.

- The Tang obsession with conformity gradually faded. Poetry naturally migrated into other aspects of elite life, giving rise to new genres such as nature poetry, garden poetry, and occasional poetry—that is, poetry marking a social occasion.

WANG WEI

- Li Bai and Du Fu followed a path laid down by the 8th-century Tang musician, painter, poet, and statesman Wang Wei. Wang Wei was a master of court poetry who used his fame to advertise alternatives to that staid and stale genre. Among his greatest achievements are nature poems set far from court and rendered in incredibly spare verse.

- Wang Wei also set the standard in occasional poetry. Here's an example where occasional poetry might occur: If someone were assigned to a new post far from Chang'an, his friends would join him on the first leg of his journey. When they stopped that night, they'd drink a lot of ale, and compose poetry to mark the occasion.

- Here's a snippet of occasional poetry from Wang Wei:

Morning rain in Weicheng dampens the dusty ground.

All is green around the guest house, the willows' colors are fresh

Why not drink one more bowl of wine?

When you go west beyond Yang Pass there will be no old friends.

- Tang poets took their art form very seriously, but poetry could be very fun—especially the singing. Music was a specialty of Chang'an's courtesans. One particularly popular form of occasional poetry was song lyrics. Friends would challenge each other to come up with the next verse while the courtesans played the melody.

- Poems were also shared in personal correspondence and sometimes captured in the margins of paintings or even scribbled on the bare flesh of courtesans.

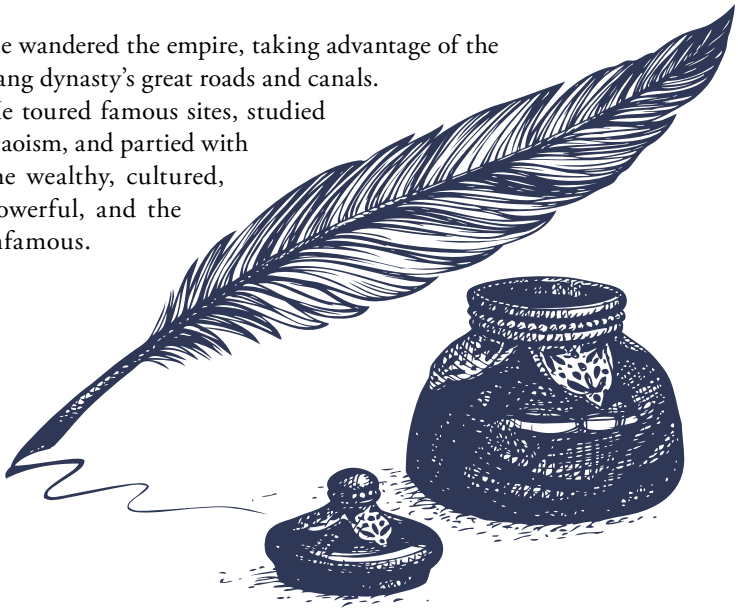
LI BAI

- Poetry was overwhelmingly an elite pastime, but it opened the way for outsiders to break into elite circles. Li Bai and Du Fu embody this phenomenon. Neither was born particularly high in society, but both achieved a degree of fame in their lifetimes, especially Li Bai.

- Born in 701, Li Bai was basically a nobody from nowhere. His father was a merchant who'd relocated from Central Asia to the Sichuan frontier in China's southwest. Li Bai shared the same family name as the Tang emperors and the Daoist philosopher Li Dan, better known as Laozi. Li Bai relished the possibility of kinship to Daoist icons and Turkic warriors, and at times he called Tang princes "cousin."

- As a relentless self-promoter, Li Bai constructed a public persona in the stories he told about himself and in the self-referential poems he composed. He claimed to be a great swordsman who dueled regularly and spent time living the romantic and blood-soaked life of a knight-errant, righting wrongs with his blade.

- He wandered the empire, taking advantage of the Tang dynasty's great roads and canals. He toured famous sites, studied Daoism, and partied with the wealthy, cultured, powerful, and the infamous.



The poem "Bring in the Ale" captures Li Bai's love of a good time and his cavalier attitude toward worldly possessions:

Heaven made me—my abilities must have a purpose

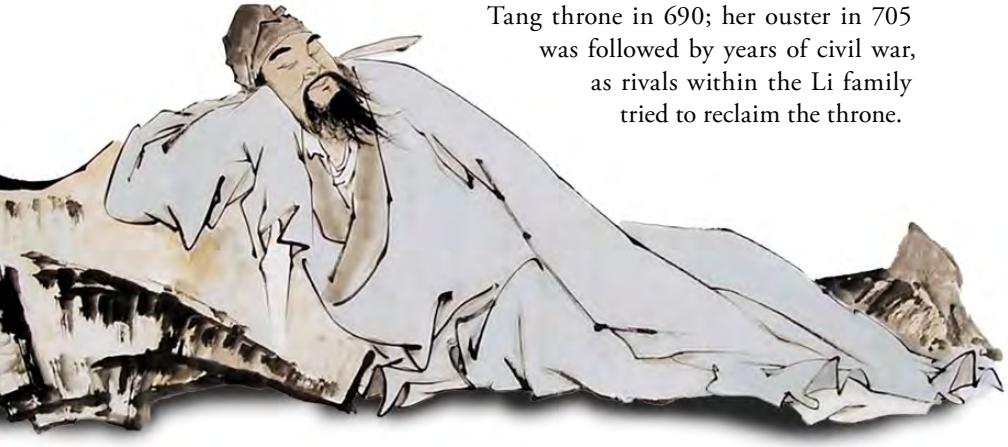
I've spent wildly a thousand pieces of gold—

I'll make them back again

- Li Bai aggressively flaunted rules and conventions, to the occasional consternation—and frequent delight—of his audience.

- Li Bai's big opportunity came in 742. The director of the imperial library arranged an audience with Emperor Xuanzong. The emperor liked him immediately. Li Bai was not an aristocrat and did not have an exam degree, but Xuanzong assigned him to his own personal think tank and culture ministry, known as the Hanlin Academy.

- Xuanzong's reign is the centerpiece of the triumph and tragedy of the Tang. His rule had begun in an atmosphere of anxious optimism. Xuanzong's grandmother was Empress Wu, the only woman in Chinese history to rule in her own name. She'd violently usurped the Tang throne in 690; her ouster in 705 was followed by years of civil war, as rivals within the Li family tried to reclaim the throne.



- Xuanzong's coronation as emperor in 712 promised a long-awaited restoration. The first four decades on his reign were an era of stability, security, and economic and cultural flourishing. Xuanzong himself was a musician, artist, and poet, as well as a generous patron of the arts.

- But in the 750s, Xuanzong began to neglect his duties. He came under the sway of his consort, Yang Guifei. He's reputed to have let Yang Guifei's brother, Yang Guozhong, essentially take over the government.

- Back to Li Bai: He claimed that he'd made enemies at court, and those enemies were out to embarrass him. On more than one occasion, they had a drunken Li Bai suddenly summoned to an imperial audience. Totally inebriated, he nonetheless composed flawless poems on the spot, to the delight of Xuanzong.

- But Li's foes eventually drove a wedge between the poet and the emperor. They convinced Xuanzong that Li had made veiled insults about Yang Guifei. Legend has it that Xuanzong exiled Li Bai, but, with the deepest regret, lavished gifts on him. He spent the next decade studying Daoist alchemy, sampling elixirs of immortality, and composing verse.

DU FU

- Around the same time, a far more sober and socially conscious poet had begun to make his mark. That was Du Fu, who was about a decade younger than Li Bai. Du's family wasn't particularly well off, but they did have a prestigious reputation, as Du Fu's grandfather had been a court poet in the 7th century.

- A young Du Fu refused to accept a government office based only on his family's status. He wanted to earn a post by passing the imperial exams. But he didn't have the connections or the mastery of courtly writing conventions that exam success required.

- Denied the chance to serve the empire in a meaningful capacity, Du Fu spent his formative years traveling, studying and writing poetry. He met Li Bai in 744 and admired the older poet. Du Fu wrote several poems to and about Li Bai.

Du Fu

- By the time he was in his 30s, Du Fu was an accomplished, though fairly obscure, poet. But examination success continued to elude him. He finally gave up and accepted a minor appointment in the capital. He hadn't earned the post the way he'd wanted, but at least he had a chance to serve his emperor and his fellow man.

- But upheaval was coming. In 755, one of the Tang's generals, An Lushan, rose in rebellion and marched on Chang'an. Emperor Xuanzong fled the capital and was forced to abdicate. His bodyguards also forced him to execute Yang Guifei. They, like many, blamed Guifei and her brother for An Lushan's rebellion.

- At the time, Li Bai was living in Yangzhou, a commercial center on the Grand Canal. With the capital in rebel hands, a feud erupted between rival claimants to the Tang throne. Li Bai wound up backing the wrong Tang prince. He was exiled to the southwest.

- Li Bai was eventually pardoned. But with the empire in chaos, he never returned to the glittering life of the capital. Instead, he went back to wandering, and he died in 762.

- As for Du Fu, when An Lushan's troops took Chang'an, the poet barely escaped. In 757, he was rewarded with a post at the restored Tang court. But Du Fu quickly soured on politics. He turned his poetry toward condemning the powerful and advertising the woes of the weak.

- A particular target was the corrupt prime minister Yang Guozhong, widely blamed for the An Lushan rebellion. Du Fu wrote:

Behind the red painted palace doors, wine and meat are rotting

On the wild roads lie corpses of people frozen to death

A breadth of hair divides wealth and utter poverty

This strange contrast fills me with unappeasable anguish

- Du Fu himself was relatively fortunate. He had influential friends and a modicum of fame, and that was enough to see him through the rough spots. One reason we have so many of Du Fu's poems is because he shared them in correspondence with these wealthy friends. He spent his remaining years in genteel retirement. He died in 770 at the age of 58.

THE SHADOWS

- Li Bai and Du Fu cast long shadows. By the end of the Tang period, they had become something of a dialectical pair: the serious and socially conscious Du Fu balanced against the ecstatic, iconoclastic, and famously self-indulgent Li Bai.

- They occupy the pinnacle of Chinese literature. But their lives were also marked by trauma, tragedy, and loss.

- An Lushan's rebellion also cast a long shadow. The revolt accelerated trends that would transform China socially, economically, and politically over the next 500 years. But throughout those centuries of change, Li Bai and Du Fu remained required reading for generations of new elites.

- These new elites were the literati; they emerged in the transition from the aristocratic Tang to the meritocratic and Confucian Song dynasty of the 10th to 13th centuries. For the literati, Du Fu was the model of decorum and social conscience, while Li Bai remained the guilty pleasure.

SUGGESTED READING

Lewis, *China's Cosmopolitan Empire*.
Owen, *The Great Age of Chinese Poetry*.
Pulleyblank, *The Background of the Rebellion of An Lu-shan*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- How did poetry function as a vehicle for social interaction and social commentary in Tang China?

- Why did alcohol figure so prominently in production of poetry?

- How did the life experiences and personal aspirations of Li Bai and Du Fu influence their poetry?

- How did the three teachings of Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism influence the literary expressions and life styles of the cultural elite in Tang China?

LIFE AND TIMES OF SONG DYNASTY LITERATI

Perhaps the most profound political, cultural, and philosophical shift in Chinese history took place over the five centuries from An Lushan's rebellion in 755 to the Southern Song dynasty of the 13th century. This period is called the Tang-Song transition, and it was an era when the aristocratic Tang dynasty (which ran from 618 to 907) gave way to a new political system that was autocratic at the top but something akin to egalitarian at the middle. This idea that Song dynasty China was both more autocratic and more egalitarian sounds paradoxical. But the social hierarchy was minute at the top and wider at the level of the literati, or educated class, also known as the *shi*.

Scholars, Tang dynasty

EXAMINATIONS

- The broadening of the elite had a lot to do with the civil service examination system. From the Han through the Tang dynasties, the sons of the great clans had been guaranteed most government posts. From the Song era forward, however, the exams were the primary path to official position, broadening the elite to include all classically literate men.

- The exams tested knowledge of the Confucian classics, compiled by Confucius's disciples between the 7th and 5th centuries BCE. And the exams tested how well one could apply these teachings to contemporary issues.

- The whole empire was governed by about 30,000 civil officials. The majority of test takers never made the cut. Most kept on trying, though, because being classically literate made someone one of the elite.

- What did people who couldn't or wouldn't serve do? The two literati this lecture examines offer answers to that question. Both served as officials but had interesting lives outside of office. The first is the Northern Song man, Su Shi. The second is the Southern Song moral philosopher and architect of Neo-Confucianism, Zhu Xi.

- Historians divide the Song into two periods. The Northern Song dates from 960 to 1127 when the capital was at Kaifeng, north of the Yangtze River. The Southern Song runs from 1127 to 1279, when the capital was at Hangzhou, south of the Yangtze.

SU SHI

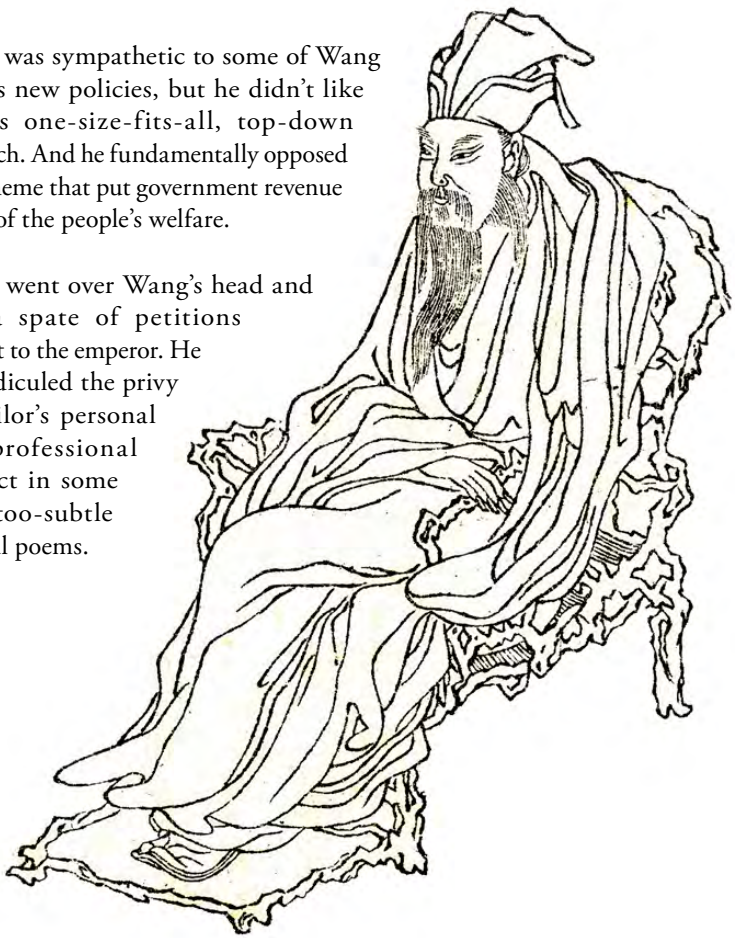
- Su Shi was born in 1037 in the southwestern province of Sichuan, a rough frontier of jungles. The Su family was highly cultured. Su Shi's father was a famous essayist. Their mother, Lady Cheng, oversaw the children's education, financed by her successful clothing business.

- Su Shi's early career started out in an unremarkable way. His first posting was to Fengxiang Prefecture in modern Shaanxi province, near the Song-Tangut frontier. Su Shi spent his time learning about the regional economy and listening to the grievances of the locals.

- In 1069, an aggressive reformer named Wang Anshi became privy councilor. Wang wanted to put the Song on a stronger fiscal footing. He planned to cut military expenses, reform the tax code, and shift the civil service exams from the classics to current affairs.

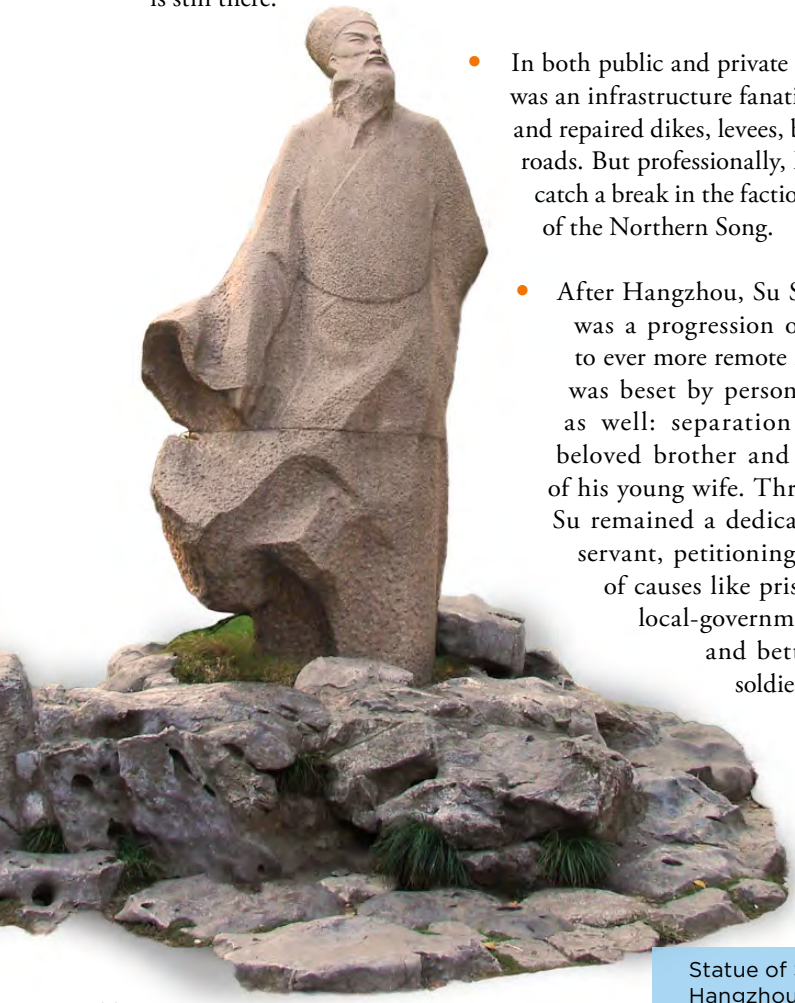
- Su Shi was sympathetic to some of Wang Anshi's new policies, but he didn't like Wang's one-size-fits-all, top-down approach. And he fundamentally opposed any scheme that put government revenue ahead of the people's welfare.

- Su Shi went over Wang's head and sent a spate of petitions straight to the emperor. He also ridiculed the privy councilor's personal and professional conduct in some none-too-subtle satirical poems.



- The poetry cost the young scholar his plum job. Packed off from the capital, Su Shi was assigned the busy port city of Hangzhou, near modern Shanghai. Su Shi and Hangzhou have been inseparable ever since.

- Hangzhou's most scenic spot is West Lake, which owes its existence to Su Shi. Su Shi became an expert hydraulic manager. The causeway he built across West Lake kept it from reverting to salt marsh. The causeway is still there.



- In both public and private life, Su Shi was an infrastructure fanatic: He built and repaired dikes, levees, bridges and roads. But professionally, he couldn't catch a break in the factional politics of the Northern Song.

- After Hangzhou, Su Shi's career was a progression of postings to ever more remote locales. He was beset by personal tragedy as well: separation from his beloved brother and the death of his young wife. Through it all, Su remained a dedicated public servant, petitioning on behalf of causes like prison reform, local-government reform, and better pay for soldiers.

Statue of Su Shi, Hangzhou, China

- Su Shi brought joy to his contemporaries. Wherever he served, he threw regular parties where his wide circle of friends ate, drank, joked, and shared poetry. A lot of Su's own poetry deals with homesickness and separation from loved ones, but he also wrote poems about his public works that fairly crackle with enthusiasm, such as the one about the great floating bridge he built in Huizhou, in modern Guangdong province.

- Most literati would never hold office, but they didn't have to if they wanted to emulate Su Shi. He was a model of the well-rounded literatus. Aside from being a public servant, essayist, and poet, he was also a painter, calligrapher, raconteur, gourmand, as well as an expert in agriculture, hydraulics, and even medicine.

ZHU XI

- The other pivotal figure in shaping the culture of the literati was the Southern Song moral philosopher Zhu Xi. By his time, the Song dynasty had lost control of the north and, as a result, was wracked by crisis and soul searching.

- Zhu Xi was born in 1130, three years after the Song retreat to Hangzhou, its new capital. He was from the coastal province of Fujian. His father had been a minor official but had fallen afoul of a powerful minister and died in disgrace when Zhu Xi was only 13.

Zhu Xi

- Zhu Xi's education was overseen by a brilliant mother. He passed the *jinshi* imperial exam at 19. Zhu held some low-profile official assignments, but his talents leaned much more toward scholarship and teaching. He wrote commentaries on ancient texts and founded numerous academies, where thousands of students rediscovered the Confucian classics.

Statue of Zhu Xi at the White Deer Grotto Academy in China

- Zhu Xi believed that the true teachings of Confucius had been lost because people had lost sight of Confucianism's spiritual dimensions. As a youth, he studied Daoism and Buddhism, but later repudiated both. He felt that everything you needed to lead a spiritual life could be found in the Confucian classics.

- Dao is the eternal cosmic principle—the way the universe works. Mencius—Confucius's most important disciple—had argued that human nature was fundamentally good because inherent is *li*. That's what connects us to the Dao; it's a seed of cosmic principle planted in all of us. It is an imprint of morality, benevolence, propriety, and righteousness.

- The problem is that *li* is buried in a mess of *qi*. *Qi* is the psychological and physical stuff people are made of, including our bodies and our emotions. Desire, wantonness, cruelty, drunkenness, and gluttony cause and are caused by murky and turbulent *qi*. The only way to tap into *li* is to clarify your *qi*.

- The only way to clarify your *qi* is to study intensely and rectify your personal conduct. Zhu Xi argued that the literati were studying the wrong way and for the wrong reasons.

- They were studying the wrong way because they were trying to master too many texts without any clear guidance. And literati were studying for the wrong reason because they were primarily trying to impress their examination graders, not trying to better themselves.

- According to Zhu Xi, studying is about spiritual enlightenment, not exam success. Zhu Xi created a focused and sequential curriculum. Instead of mastering the five daunting classics called for in the civil service exams, one should start with a more manageable set of four books. These were *The Great Learning*, the *Analects*, *Mencius*, and the *Doctrine of the Mean*. They're much less voluminous and contain the clearest exposition of the way of the ancient Confucian masters.

- Zhu Xi did not mind poetry and calligraphy in moderation, but he was critical of literati like Su Shi, whom he thought were too obsessed with high style and the latest fashions.

- Zhu Xi's brand of Confucianism—what we call neo-Confucianism—can come across as preachy, and it has come under a lot of criticism. It's blamed for the conservative turn in Chinese culture. Neo-Confucianism is also blamed for a decline in the status of women. Neo-Confucians demanded that women be subordinate to men. And women's educations were meant to pass down strict expectations of female behavior.

- Neo-Confucians also promoted the idea that widows should remain loyal to her dead husband's family and not remarry. Furthermore, Zhu Xi was a proponent of foot binding.

- However, neo-Confucianism was a fit to the political and demographic shifts occurring in China. Neo-Confucianism was a grassroots ethos: Morality percolated from the educated local elite and dispersed across the empire.

- One of Zhu Xi's books, *Family Rituals*, sketches out the daily life of an elite scholar-gentry family, and similar guidebooks followed for the common folk. In combination, these texts codified many of the traditions that define Chinese culture.

- *Family Rituals* set the moral compass for the lineage. And it didn't stop at the walls of the family compound. As a neo-Confucian literatus, you would be expected to be a leader of your clan and your community. You'd oversee family property and enterprises and sponsor public works, like irrigation projects. You'd also run charities and mediate local conflicts.

- Having millions of literati who felt obligated to be good sons and fathers—and good, socially active neighbors—made governing the empire easier and cheaper. By the 15th century, a county magistrate might oversee a population of anywhere from 100,000 to 500,000.

- Governing a large and unfamiliar population should have been impossible. But as county magistrate, you'd find a large number of peers who'd studied all the same books and were generally committed to keeping peace and good order in your jurisdiction.

- However, there were some tradeoffs. At the local level, relations between the magistrate and the gentry weren't always smooth. There was a natural tension between the imperial center and local populations. A local literatus might even look down on a magistrate as swimming in the cesspit of corruption.

- At the very top, the emperor had endorsed Zhu Xi's exam curriculum, but that essentially made principled political opposition by the most powerful officials legitimate. That's good because principled opposition was a check on imperial overreach, but oppositional politics also contributed to the bureaucratic gridlock that frequently plagued imperial China.

- Still, the fact that neo-Confucianism became the curriculum for the civil service examinations didn't mean that literati all became preachy and dully conservative. There was still plenty of cultural vitality. In fact, the two literati discussed in this lecture—Su Shi and Zhu Xi—laid the foundations for the simultaneous cultural richness and political stability of late imperial China.

SUGGESTED READING

Bol, *"This Culture of Ours."*
Ebrey, *Chu Hsi's Family Ritual*.
Egan, *Word, Image, and Deed in the Life of Su Shi*.
Gardner, *Chu Hsi*.
Kuhn, *The Age of Confucian Rule*.
Robert, "Demographic, Political, and Social Transformations of China, 750–1550."
Wills, "Su Dongpo."

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- How did the lives of the Song literati differ from that of elites in the Tang dynasty?
- How did the civil service examination system give rise to the scholar-official class?
- How would you characterize the relationship between the scholar-officials and the state in Song China?
- How did Zhu Xi's approach to learning differ from that of Su Shi?
- Why would Zhu Xi have been critical of someone like Su Shi?
- How might Zhu Xi's family rituals have shaped daily life in late imperial China?

A DAY'S JOURNEY ALONG THE QINGMING SCROLL

One of China's most famous paintings is the *Qingming Shanghe tu*, also known as the Qingming scroll. It's a hand scroll painted by the artist Zhang Zeduan in the early 12th century CE; today, it is housed in the Palace Museum in Beijing. It is remarkably well preserved. But it's not the kind of painting you look at all at once. As a hand scroll, you progress gradually through the landscape by slowly unrolling it. It's quite a trip, as this lecture shows. Only about 10 inches tall, the scroll unrolls for 17 feet. It includes images of nearly 900 people and animals along with a dizzying array of vehicles, buildings, and vegetation.

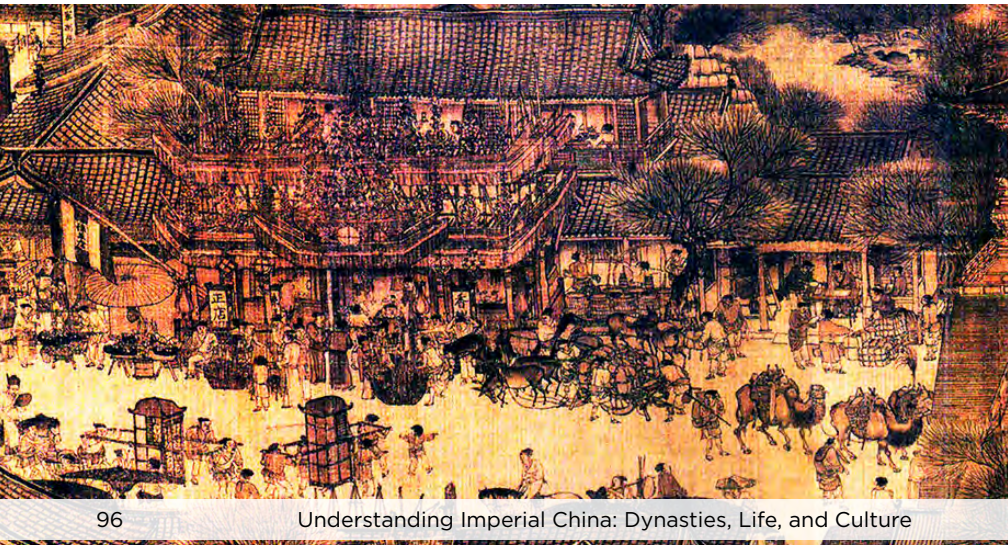
OVERVIEW OF THE SCROLL

- The scroll tells us a good deal about how art was enjoyed in imperial China. Unlike a framed painting or a mural, a hand scroll is eminently portable, and intimately engaging. If you were a member of the educated class, you and your literati friends might bring a selection of scrolls to a party and debate artistic merits and motivations over a few bowls of ale.

- The scroll has a colophon, which is an inscription on a manuscript or a painting that contains some facts about its production. In this case, the colophon occupies a rare uncrowded spot on the Qingming scroll.

- It includes Zhang Zeduan's birthplace, a little about his training, and the fact that he enjoyed imperial patronage. But the colophon says nothing about his inspiration for this masterpiece.

- It's also unclear what locale is being depicted. Conventional wisdom holds that the scroll depicts the former imperial capital of Kaifeng, but there are no historically verifiable landmarks.



- The exact date of the painting is also in question. This is important. Historians divide the Song dynasty in two: The Northern Song dates from 960 to 1127, when the capital was in the north at Kaifeng. The Southern Song ran from 1127 to 1279, when the capital was located at the southern port of Hangzhou.

- There is also some debate about how to translate the painting's title. *Qingming shanghe tu* is inscribed at the beginning of the scroll. The first two words—*qing* and *ming*—are often thought to refer to the Qingming Festival. That's the grave-sweeping holiday that occurs in early April, when people travel to their ancestor's graves and spruce them up.

- There are two problems with that theory: There isn't any tomb-sweeping going on in the painting. And if it's the Qingming Festival, the weather looks unseasonably warm—more like summer than early spring.

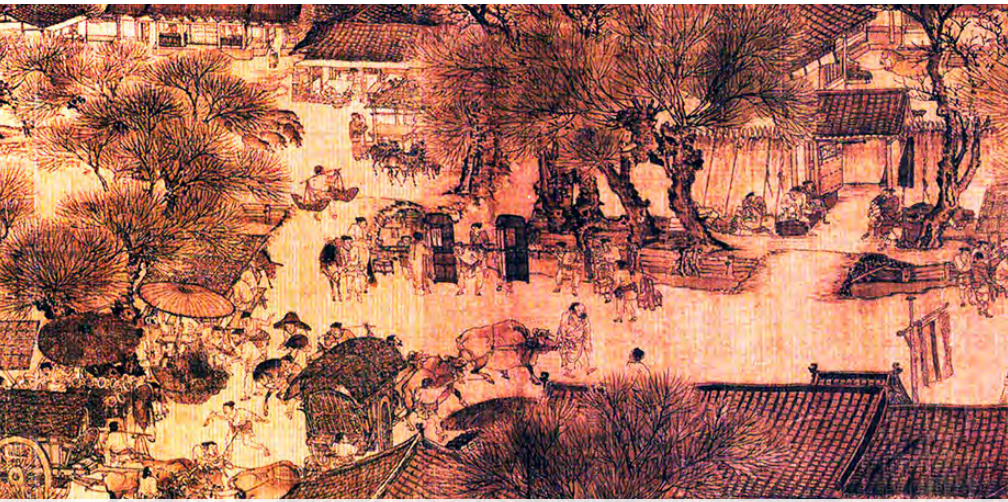
- That leads some scholars to think that *Qingming* isn't a reference to grave-sweeping day but instead should be interpreted more literally. *Qing* means "bright" or "peaceful." *Ming* means "clear" and "orderly."

- The second part of the title, *shanghetu*, is much simpler: *shang* (up), *he* (the river), and *tu* (image) mean an "image of traveling up the river." So rather than a scene of traveling up the river during the Qingming Festival, we might be dealing with an idealized "image of peace and order along the river"

DAILY LIFE

- Despite its mysteries, an exploration of the painting can tell us a lot about life during the Song dynasty and China's age of invention. It's a time when China was the world's most economically and technologically advanced society, as well as its most urbanized. The period brought paper money, porcelain, tea, gunpowder, the compass, and other historic innovations.

- But while urbanized, Zhang Zeduan wanted viewers to see the connections between rural and urban. Part of the scroll depicts the countryside in a willow grove, with simple timber-and-thatch dwellings. Locals tend their fields and flocks.



- A path runs parallel to a canal toward the city. The closer the scroll gets to the city walls, the more lively things become. If this is the ancient capital of Kaifeng, also known as Bianjing, then the canal is the channeled course of the Bian River.

- If this isn't Kaifeng, but some other prosperous canal port, we still see how roads and canals were central to the commercialization and political integration of the empire. This infrastructure connected horizontally across the realm and vertically from urban to rural.

A PORT

- Seagoing technology is a large part of the scroll. The first barge shown on the scroll, at a port, seems to be getting ready to load. The ramp is out and the master looks to collect cargo.

- Several cargo ships are moored side-by-side. They have adjustable sternpost rudders that allowed for nimbler navigation. Viewers can also see a critical Song innovation in detail. It is a windlass system that allows the crew to raise and lower the rudder.

- Deeper rudder depth made these ships stable in coastal and river waters. But by raising the rudder, a ship could pass through shallow canals and sail all the way up to the suburbs of major cities. The ships would also have featured state-of-the-art anchors, complex rigging, and watertight bulkheads.

- Another Song invention was a magnetic mariner's compass. Merchant ships could ply the seas as well as China's internal waterways. These ships are just as likely to be offloading tea and silk from within the empire as they were to be delivering cinnamon and cloves from Java and Sumatra or fine paper from Korea.

SUBURBS AND THE BRIDGE

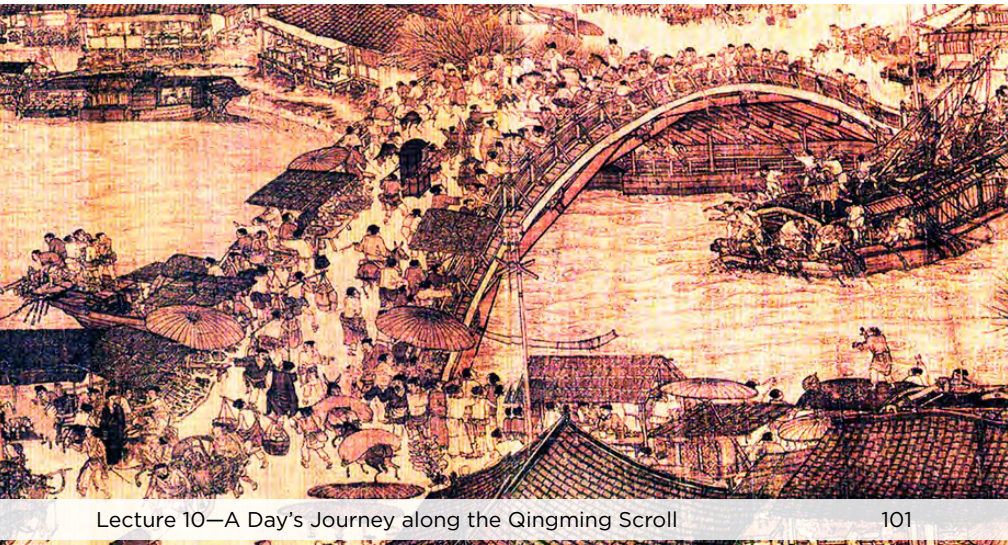
- Along the scroll's rural-to-city continuum, suburbs spring up within view of the city walls. Restaurants, snack stands, and apothecaries are opening for the day. One of the apothecary shops has a sign out advertising a hangover remedy.

- Outside the city proper, viewers can see merchants and craftsmen taking advantage of the lower real estate prices and the laxer regulations beyond the city wall. In the 1120s, Bianjing had a population of about 1 million: half of it inside the city wall, the rest in the suburbs.

- The centerpiece of the painting—the famous rainbow bridge—is one of the densest and most raucous scenes in the scroll. It's a microcosm of the commercialism, social churn, and technological sophistication of the Song dynasty. Merchants and customers crowd the rainbow bridge. A lot of money changes hands on the bridge and across the Qingming scroll in general.

- The advent of printing brought paper money and printed periodicals, manuals, and books. Popular culture also flourished in the Song. Novels and short stories abounded, and in the Qingming scroll, we see storytellers entertaining passers-by with ripping yarns. To jog their memories, these storytellers often used mass-produced crib sheets.

- It's little surprise that the rainbow bridge is packed with hawkers selling paper goods. Others are peddling dim sum: pre-portioned snacks like dumplings, sticky rice, and sweets.

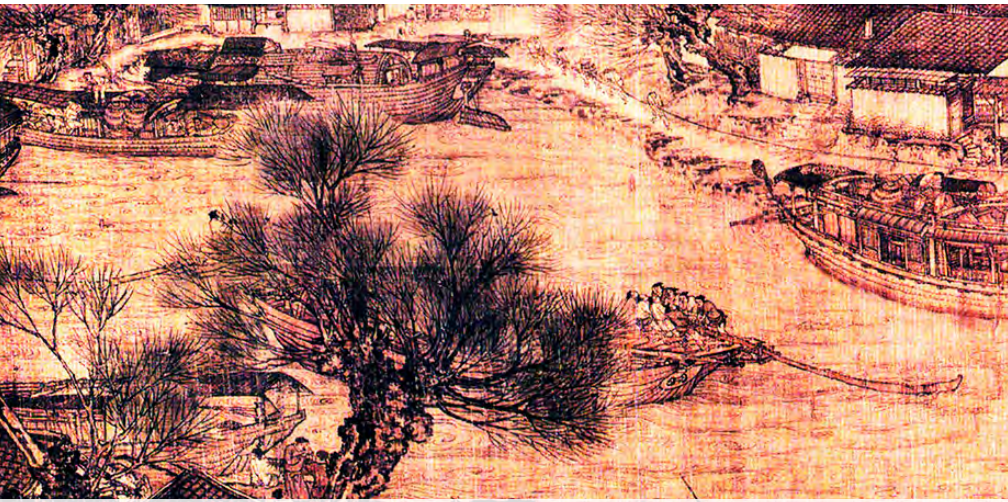


- Another hawker on the bridge is selling iron tools. Proto-industrial iron production was common in Song China. Mechanized blast furnaces were in wide use. One of the more remarkable examples of this industry is the 70-foot-tall, 50-ton Iron Pagoda at the Yuquan Temple in Hubei Province. Peasants and craftsmen created a steady demand for high-quality iron implements.

THE CITY

- The scroll's city wall is punctuated by one gate for the road and another for the canal. A small caravan of Bactrian camels is present at one nearby point in the scroll. The Northern song traded with two semi-nomadic polities: the Turkic Xi Xia to the northwest and the Khitans of the Liao dynasty to the northeast.

- Trade and periodic payments of tribute were how the Song kept the peace with these neighbors. But that system failed catastrophically on two occasions. The first was in the 1120s, when the Jurchen Jin dynasty

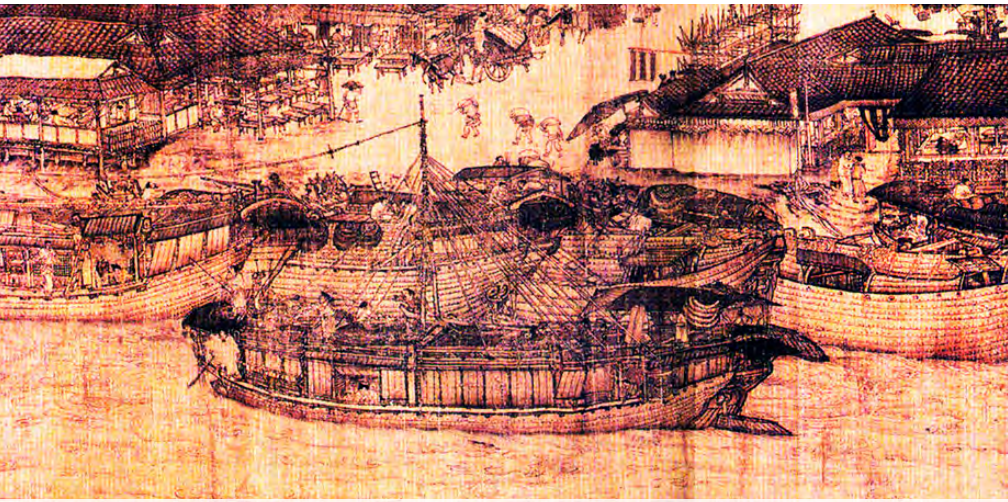


conquered the Liao and forced the Song to abandon the North. The second was when Kublai Khan turned his energies to conquering what was left of the Song in the 1270s.

- The scroll depicts a less traumatic time. The Bactrian camels—the pride of the caravans—show that trade between China and its northern neighbors remained robust.

- Traditionally, China's cities were laid out on a grid, with sharply delineated government districts, residential wards, and carefully regulated official markets. The city in the scroll is much more organic. It's still bounded by a wall, but within the wall is a chaotic churn of commerce, social interaction, and governance, indicative of the social fluidity that characterized the Song.

- Spaces for trade, entertainment, religion, and government aren't neatly compartmented. Instead, shops spring up wherever business is good. Opulent mansions share the same streets as temples, nightclubs, and noodle shops.



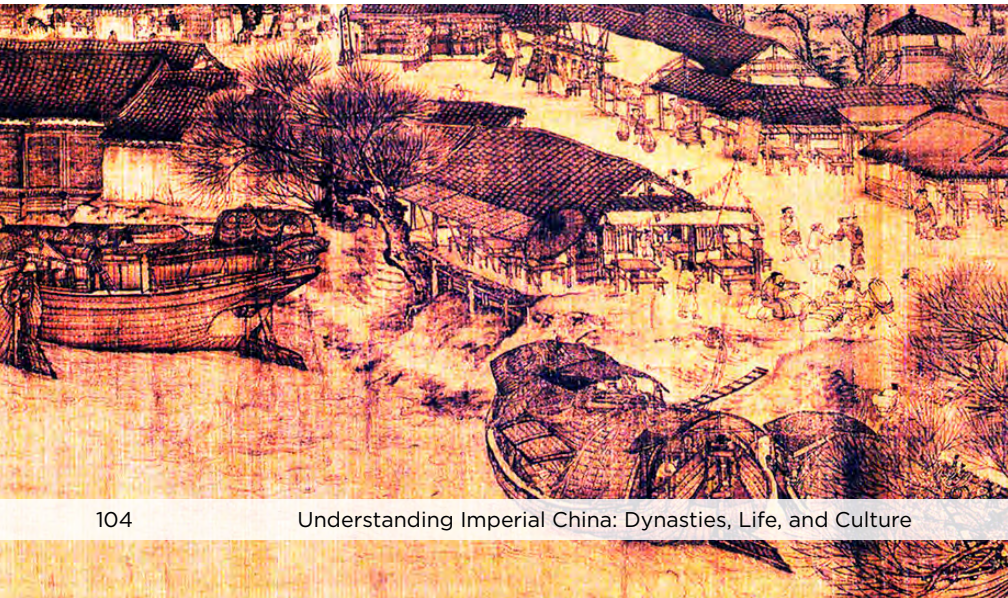
- The scroll also provides a glimpse of Song eating and drinking habits, from the dumpling shops and dive bars down on the wharves to lavish wine emporiums for the rich and powerful.

- Song cities were cosmopolitan and diverse. Merchants and officials from across the empire sometimes wanted a taste of home and created demand for restaurants that specialized in China's regional cuisines.

- In bigger cities, food lovers were attracted to diverse types of eateries. Rather than homogenizing China's cuisine, the Song enshrined the love of regional variation and witnessed the beginnings of a culture of travel and tourism.

REFLECTIONS

- The Qingming scroll is highly realistic, but it's also idealized. What isn't shown in the painting—soldiers, criminals, and prostitutes, for example—reveals some things about art, morality, and memory in Song China.

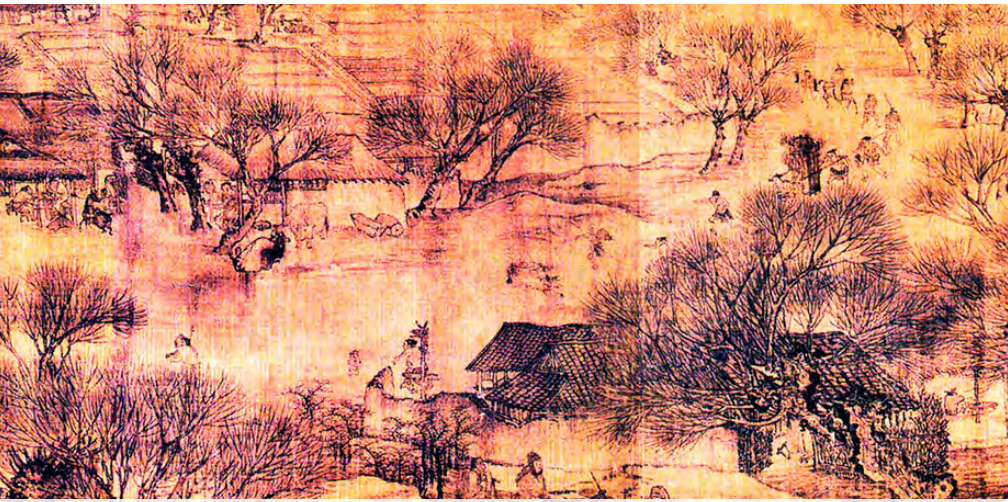


- For instance, there's no trash. Every great city had waste-management problems. But waste could be a good thing for some: Firms that collected and transported human and animal waste did well. Additionally, household and restaurant leftovers were used for compost and as pig-slop. Still, Song administrators knew that cities could get dirty quickly, and they remained vigilant to enforce sanitation laws.

- There are also no firemen or the fire watchtowers that populated the skyline of a Song city. Timber-framed Chinese cities were prone to fires that could burn tens of thousands of dwellings and displace hundreds of thousands of people at a time.

- The scroll also doesn't show much of the urban underclass, especially beggars and thieves. These types were legion in cities like Bianjing and Hangzhou, so much so that they had their own guilds.

- One section does show what looks like a jail, its wall topped with spikes. But the guards are lazing around the front gate, hinting at the unnatural law and order of the city.



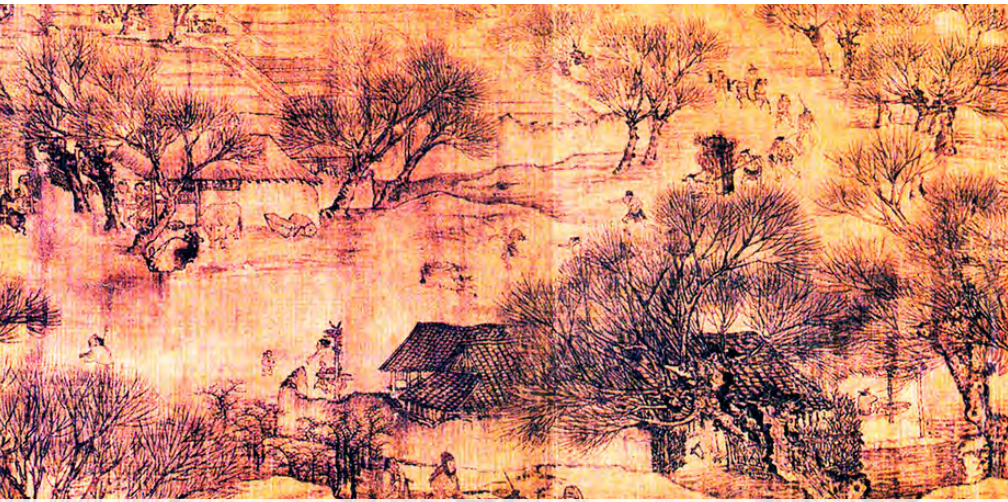
- Zhang Zeduan probably produced this scroll around the same time that North China was conquered by foreign invaders in the 1120s. That defeat would have been deeply traumatic for the Song leadership. One can imagine the emperor and his court spending hours in nostalgic reverie remembering what had been lost.

- At the same time, reflecting on this painting would likely remind the emperor of two fundamentals:

  1. His job was to secure the peace and prosperity of the empire, and he had a chance to reboot the dynasty in the sanctuary of the south.

  2. Even with the loss of the north, the Southern Song dynasty still had a lot going for it.

- The Southern Song endured for some 150 years after the loss of the north. This was in the face of formidable foes, including the Mongols. In large part, they survived because of the technological, cultural, and economic sophistication that is on display in the Qingming scroll.

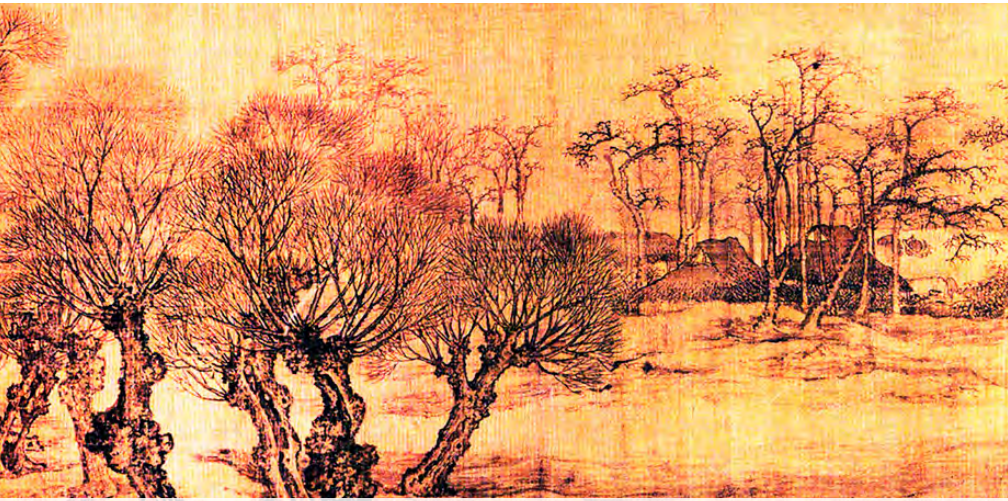


SUGGESTED READING

Elvin, *The Pattern of the Chinese Past*.
Gernet, *Daily Life in China on the Eve of the Mongol Invasion, 1250–1276*.
Knapp, *Chinese Bridges*.
Kuhn, *The Age of Confucian Rule*.
Lo, *China as a Sea Power, 1127–1368*.
NOVA, *Secrets of Lost Empires*.
So, *Prosperity, Region, and Institutions in Maritime China*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- How important was commerce to the daily lives of people living in the Song dynasty?
- How important was water transport to the day-to-day functioning of the Chinese empire?
- How important were paper and printing in the daily lives people in the Song Dynasty?



Lecture 11

PEASANT LIFE ON THE YELLOW RIVER

China's massive Yellow River begins as runoff from Himalayan glaciers and flows from the Tibetan Plateau to the Yellow Sea. The river water—and the brownish yellow soil it deposits—have long sustained agriculture on the North China Plain. That's why the Yellow River watershed is considered the cradle of Chinese civilization. At the same time, massive floods and catastrophic shifts in the waterway's course have also earned the Yellow River the epithet China's Sorrow.

ABOUT THE RIVER

- The North China Plain is an alluvial flood plain that covers 158,000 square miles. Upstream, the river's course is narrow and steep. As a result, millions of tons of yellow-brown soil, called loess, is carried by the river. That's what gives the Yellow River its name.

- Downstream, however, the current slows and the river widens. The loess—which constitutes as much as 6 to 7 percent of the river's mass—starts to silt out.

- In Chinese, Yellow River is *Huang He*. *Huang* is the color: yellowish brown. *He* describes a type of river: broad and meandering.

- Like the Nile, the Yellow River floods regularly, and the silt that's deposited refreshes the soil of the North China Plain. But the silt also progressively raises the riverbed. If it can't be dredged, man-made levees are built higher and higher. At high water, the Yellow River might flow 30 to 40 feet above surrounding countryside.

Map of the Yellow River

CHALLENGES

- Seasonal variations in rainfall have big effects. The river runs fullest in the wet months from July to October, and lowest in spring and early summer, when farmers need water most. Historically, this means that the Yellow River wasn't a reliable source for irrigation, and the silt clogged up irrigation channels fast. Therefore, North China's farmers relied on well water.

- To survive under these conditions, farming villages clustered on high ground, with farmers' fields spreading out around their huts and houses. A Chinese farmer's life was a communal experience and there was a good deal of sharing of resources.

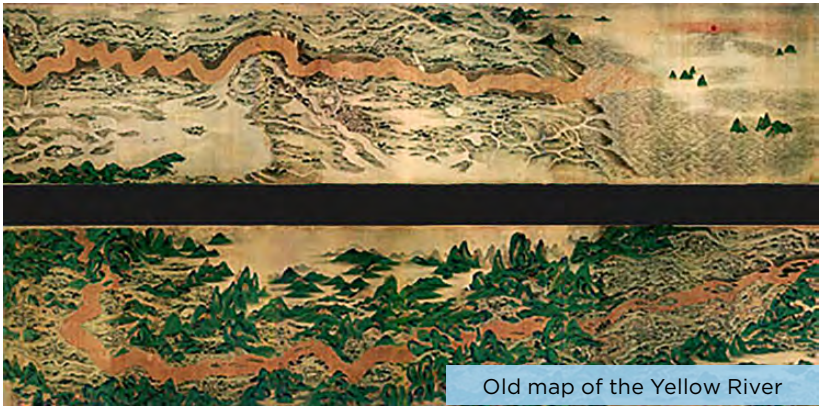
- However, they did not practice collective agriculture. The basic unit of Chinese agriculture was primarily the family farm, which rarely consisted of a single contiguous plot of land. Instead, families would work several dispersed small plots.

- Imperial China's founding dynasties valued—and elevated—the industrious small land owner and his nuclear family: a hardy pair of sons helping in the fields along with a wife and daughters skilled at weaving. The traditional ideal of farm labor broke down along gender lines.

OWNERSHIP

- In the Qin dynasty, which ran from 221 to 206 BCE, 90 percent of the population consisted of farmers with small holdings—roughly 4 to 30 acres—worked by a family of four or five.

- The Han dynasty, which ruled from 206 BCE to 220 CE, tried to maintain the small farm as the bedrock ideal. The Han distributed vacant and reclaimed land to small farming families. However, their policies ended up encouraging merchants to invest their wealth in land. The result was an increase in landlordism and tenancy.



Old map of the Yellow River

- The founder of the Tang dynasty, Emperor Gaozu—whose reign began in 618—tried to reboot the small-landholder concept with something called the equal field system. Open land was taken by the government for redistribution. But instead of giving or selling this land to peasants, the Tang loaned out plots for the course of a farmer's productive life, usually from ages 18 to 60.

- During that period, farmers owed taxes as a percentage of the crop and 20–30 days of corvée labor. At age 60, those requirements ended. However, except for a small plot for gardening, the property reverted to the state for redistribution.

- The Tang dynasty couldn't sustain the equal-field system. As a result, landlordism and tenancy rose again from the mid-8th century onward. From that point forward, few attempts were made at comprehensive land-redistribution. Instead, while land and crop taxes remained the primary sources of state revenue, the state did little to interfere with land ownership.

- Large farms did have an edge in productivity over small farms, and there were lots of landless peasants and tenant farmers in imperial China. But still the small family farm proved quite durable and productive: It existed side by side with large estates.

The Yellow River

PEASANT LIFE

- In the imperial view, best articulated during the Ming Dynasty (circa 1368 to 1644), villages of to 50 to 100 households were the natural interface between the state and the people and the primary means of maintaining social order.

- Internally, village elders were empowered to mediate local disputes, keep the village census, and see to the education and moral cultivation of the young. Externally, elders made sure that their neighbors paid their taxes and showed up for military and labor service.

- Charity and public service became markers of local elite status. It reinforced moral and emotional ties and reduced perceived inequalities. Elders and elites were expected to be charitable to their poorer neighbors and relations. Many villages shared a single surname, that is, everyone was related.

Town of Qikou near the Yellow River

- In the 20th century, the communist leader Mao Zedong labeled rich peasants and landlords as the oppressive class, enemies of the poor peasantry. Historically, though, North China's villages weren't terribly prone to class warfare. There were periodic and sometimes massive peasant rebellions, but for the most part rural society was relatively stable.

- Peasant housing was fairly basic: a small house with walls of rammed earth or mudbrick and a thatched roof. A fancier variant might feature wooden rafters topped with clay tiles. Instead of windows, there would be bare openings shuttered with wood in winter.

- Peasant clothing—often homespun—consisted of trousers and tunics made of coarse hemp, nettle cloth, or cotton, along with sandals of hemp or straw. In winter, peasants would wear cloth boots and a wool or cotton coat. Both boots and coat could be insulated with grass or straw.

- The peasant diet consisted primarily of noodles and steamed buns—reflecting the prevalence of wheat, millet, and barley in North China—supplemented by soybeans, root vegetables, and greens from household gardens. Most peasants also kept ducks, geese, and chickens, providing eggs and the occasional meat dish. Pork was especially prized, and pigs were often housed with the family.

- The farming year started in the spring. Iron plows pulled by horses or oxen were the big innovation of the Han dynasty. Iron plows made for deeper furrows, which were easier to irrigate and better protected from wind and weather. Peasants who couldn't afford iron plows relied on wooden tools.

- Autumn harvest was the most intense time of year. Entire families mobilized. In winter, peasants sorted their crops, storing the best grain for seed and the rest for food. Other tasks were milling flour, preserving vegetables, and cutting wood.

- Given spare time and money, young boys might attend the village school. Peasant girls, on the other hand, developed the skills that would make them attractive brides. Marriage was mostly arranged and contracted outside the home village.

- Marriage was an exchange of labor and a way to build connections between villages. The bride's father would want compensation for raising a daughter. The groom's father would need gifts of liquor, food, and money to secure his son a healthy, hardworking, and cooperative young bride. That's known as the bride price.

GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

- During the Song dynasty—from the 10th to 13th centuries—periodic rural markets took off. From this point forward, significant commercialization of the rural economy occurred. Peasants had more opportunities to sell grain, fruits, vegetables, meat, and handicrafts.

- A web of commerce linked discrete villages to local weekly markets. Those connected up to permanent market towns, and then those connected up to the empire's great trading cities. This vast commercial web integrated and cohered late imperial China.

- As for government control: By the end of the 1st century BCE, China had a population of nearly 60 million. The Han bureaucracy was roughly 100,000 strong, so the extent of government control was severely limited. Indeed, for all of its bureaucratic innovations, imperial China was fairly lightly ruled.

- Peasants were remotely aware of the public goods provided by the imperial government, such as roads, the postal service, farming manuals, and the Grand Canal. But most direct dealings with the government were extractive. Peasants still had to pay taxes, and agricultural taxes were the primary source of government revenue.

Qiankun bend of the Yellow River in Shanxi, China.

- All imperial governments strove to make the tax and labor burden bearable, but forces beyond their control—like bad weather and poor harvests—dramatically increased the stress on peasants. This was compounded by local officials who could be cruel and arbitrary.

- Collecting taxes in cash instead of in grain made farmers vulnerable to market forces. If officials demanded taxes early, farmers had to sell their crops on the cheap or borrow money. This could lead to a downward spiral of family fortunes.

- All of this meant the peasants of northern China could be a particularly rebellious bunch. Widespread peasant dissatisfaction was a volatile force. Furthermore, the huge numerical disparity between rulers and ruled in imperial China meant that peasant rebellions often built up quite a head of steam before local authorities even realized what was going on.

- On several occasions, peasant rebellions spelled the end of dynasties, or at least severely crippled them. However, the peasant economy and peasant society were, for the most part, remarkably stable. The greatest shocks to the system were not rebellions, but rather natural and man-made disasters.

DISASTERS

- During the 11th century, the Yellow River experienced a prolonged crisis. It flooded every two years over the span of eight decades. When levees failed, they did so spectacularly, with the river almost exploding onto the farmland below.

- Because the levees were 30 to 40 feet high, it took a huge amount of water to cause a breach. But once breached, the immediate impact of a flood was incredibly destructive. So, too, were the long-term impacts: Muddy silt erased villages, destroyed irrigation works, ruined wells, and choked canals—all of which had to be painstakingly rebuilt.

- In a flood crisis, officials would dragoon hundreds of thousands of peasants to shore up the dikes and levees with whatever they could find: grass, branches, and dirt. That worked in the short term, but did serious ecological damage. And emergency levees were more vulnerable to catastrophic breach.

- Much of the 11th century Yellow River crisis came about because the Song dynasty was trying to use the river strategically. At that time, the lands to the north of the Song were ruled by an aggressive state called the Liao.

- The Song hoped that by pushing the Yellow River farther north, Liao cavalry and infantry couldn't threaten the Song heartland. This strategy worked for a while. But in 1125, the Liao were overthrown by an even more aggressive state: the Jin.

- Pressing south from what is now Manchuria, the Jin tested the defenses of Kaifeng—the Song capital—in 1126. The Jin army returned the next year and seemed poised to take the city. In a desperate act to drive the invaders back, a Song general destroyed the levees on the north bank of the Yellow River, just 50 miles north of Kaifeng.

Depiction of Yellow River breaching its course

- The river violently broke out of its channel. But instead of inundating the Jin army, it swung radically to the south, devastating the North China Plain before settling into a new southern channel. There, it joined the Huai River and flowed into the sea.

- Instead of saving North China, the new course of the Yellow River now defined the boundary between the newly expanded Jin Dynasty in the north and a much-reduced Song dynasty, which retreated south.

- It's hard to gauge the exact costs of that decision. But in 1938—when Chiang Kai-shek ordered the destruction of the Yellow River levees to slow the Japanese invasion of North China—estimates counted 800,000 dead and another 10 million refugees. It's little wonder that the Yellow River is also known as China's Sorrow.

SUGGESTED READING

Harrison, *The Man Awakened from Dreams*.
Knapp, *China's Old Dwellings*.
Kuhn, *The Age of Confucian Rule*, chapter 4.
Pietz, *The Yellow River*.
Spence, *The Death of Woman Wang*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What was the traditional division of labor between men and women in a Chinese peasant family?
- How does the farming life in imperial China compare to the lives of peasants in other traditional societies?
- What was the relationship between the state and the peasants of North China?
- Why was silting such a major problem on the North China Plain?

RICE, SILK, AND TEA: SOUTH CHINA'S PEASANTS

In the 8th century CE, roughly three-quarters of China's population lived in the north, in the Yellow River watershed. Five centuries later, the empire's center of gravity had shifted south. Three-quarters of the population now lived south of the Yangtze River. Where the alluvial deposits of the north sustained wheat, millet, and sorghum, in the south, rice thrived in damp lowlands and on rain-soaked hillsides. This lecture takes a look at the lives of China's southern peasants.

"Peach Blossom Spring" scroll, 1638

THE SHIFT

- The population shift from north to south was partly the result of China's second green revolution. The first green revolution had occurred during the Qin and Han dynasties—in the 3rd century BCE—with the introduction of the ox-drawn iron plow and deep-well irrigation.

- China's second green revolution coincided with the turn of the second millennium CE. It involved wet-rice cultivation in the paddy fields of the Yangtze valley and farther south. Further innovations in plow design, irrigation works, new rice varieties, and in the perfection of paddy-field management combined to transform rural life.

- The terrain of South China is radically different from the north. But the foundation of rural society remained the compact farming village of 50 to 100 households, surrounded by fields owned and worked by villagers.

Traditional Chinese courtyard in Beijing, China

VILLAGES

- Most villages were not fortified. But they were collectively defended and strategically located to manage and protect the fields around them.

- The average peasant house was a modest rammed-earth or mudbrick structure, topped with a thatch or tile roof. Closer to major cities, timber framing became more prevalent.

- In the far south, bamboo was a common construction material used for framing and woven into a kind of plywood. Bamboo is a versatile crop. The shoots are edible and the mature grass can be woven into baskets, used for fencing, or made into a dizzying array of utensils and farm implements.

- About two-thirds of the south's rural population was families of modest means. They owned about three acres each. That wasn't quite enough for self-sufficiency, but these families had other opportunities to make ends meet: hiring themselves out at harvest time, making handicrafts, and growing cash crops.

RICE

- The centerpiece of southern agriculture was wet-rice cultivation. Rice has been grown in China for 6,000 years, but the movement of populations into the south and southeast elevated this grain to its central place in the Chinese diet.

- Wet-rice cultivation had unique rhythms that shaped the daily lives of South China's peasants. It's a labor-intensive and methodical process involving numerous stages: paddy preparation, irrigation, the raising and planting of seedlings, and weeding and harvesting.

- A good rice paddy starts with a thick and stable hardpan that holds in water. The hardpan needs to be topped by a layer of nutrient-rich mud, in which to plant seedlings. Lighter and more maneuverable plows—drawn by a single ox or water buffalo—allowed a farmer to plow and mix the mud even in oddly shaped paddy fields, while the animal's hooves simultaneously compressed the hardpan.

- Fish and ducks often shared the paddy field, providing a source of food and extra income. They produced nutrient-rich waste. Farmers also mixed in wood ash during plowing. After planting, the paddies were intensively weeded. Those weeds were collected, pulverized, and composted for yet more fertilizer.

- Also thrown into the mix was solid human waste. In fact, due to rural demand, urban firms did a brisk business exporting human waste to the countryside.

- A well-managed rice paddy became more fertile and productive over time, allowing more people to be fed from the same acreage. This helps explain the rapid growth in population during the Tang and Song dynasties. China's population likely doubled between the 8th and 11th centuries to about 150 million.

WATER

- Rice production required lots of water. Finding water wasn't a problem in South China. Controlling it was.

- The Yangtze valley is home to large lakes and to vast stretches of marshland. There is usually plenty of water. So, in these areas, the key was to drain the marshes and manage the fresh-water supply by use of polders.

- Polders are earthen dikes that surround islands of farmland just below the surrounding water. The poldered water was then fed into a field grid through sluice gates.

Farmer working in a rice paddy

- Polders were at constant risk of flooding and excess water needed to be constantly pumped out. But poldering proved to be a stable system of water management, especially where manpower was plentiful.

- Another major feature of South China is its hills, which are well watered by rain and coursed by streams. On hills, the trick was to build a series of small dams to divert the water to flow laterally. This was the beginning of the terrace farming that has transformed the landscape of South China and Southeast Asia.

ADVANCES

- We know so much about medieval rice farming because the spread of printing led to the proliferation of agricultural manuals. And even though most peasants were illiterate, officials and landlords made sure instructional information filtered down—whether out of the goodness of their hearts or simply to increase rent and tax yields.

- Another ingredient in the agrarian revolution was a new strain of fast-growing and drought-resistant rice called champa, named after its place of origin in Indo-China.

- By the late 13th century, champa rice had been cross-bred with a range of other varieties to create a diverse menu of planting options. There was slow-ripening, high-gluten rice for brewing and tougher grains that ripened fast enough to save a family after a bad early harvest.

- Ultimately, this menu of options meant that southern farmers in the 15th to 20th centuries were typically producing three rice crops every two years. In banner years, they might produce two or three crops in just 12 months.

- In the regions around Suzhou, near modern Shanghai—which is generally warm and wet—the first rice harvest came in late spring. A second crop, planted in early summer, might be ready for harvest in early fall. A smaller third crop of fast-ripening rice would be ready in late fall or early winter.

- With the harvest in, the last steps would be threshing—that is, separating the edible grain from its hull. Some rice would be set aside for sale, while the rest would be stored for family consumption or as seed for the next year. The Chinese educated class, or literati, recorded in great detail the best methods for sorting, selecting, and storing rice.

TEA

- Tea didn't catch on quickly in imperial China. While the plant is native to China, it was a foreign religion—Buddhism—that elevated the cured leaves steeped in hot water to the status of national beverage.

- Buddhist monks are prohibited from eating after noon. For refreshment during long hours of meditation, tea—a stimulant—quickly caught on in the Buddhist community of monks and nuns known as the sangha. From there, it gained a following among lay Buddhists.

- By 1000 CE, the market demand for tea was impressive. The tea bush is a hardy plant not far removed from a wild shrub, and it doesn't require much care. Moreover, tea leaves can be harvested five times a year or more.

- Tea bushes do like abundant rain and good drainage. The hilly terrain of South China is ideal, and thus tea-harvesting was an ideal cottage industry.

DIVISION OF LABOR

- Ultimately, tea harvesting became synonymous with "women's work." The classic gender-based division of labor—"men plow and women weave"—was being altered by market forces. And here, we see some of the significant changes going on in rural China.

- In a late-16th-century play, known as *The Peony Pavilion*, a new ideal of the gender division of labor is captured through the eyes of Prefect Du. Du was a local official. And while out inspecting his jurisdiction, he's delighted to see a peasant at his plow—along with a young boy herding buffaloes—while women and girls gather tea and mulberry leaves.

- It's idealized, but clearly indicative of the symbolic and real importance of women to the tea industry. And there's a point to be made here about the physical and occupational mobility of women in imperial China. As demand for tea increased, women increasingly migrated to where the work was. In doing so, they stepped out of the household to become migrant wage laborers in one of imperial China's most important industries.

- In *The Peony Pavilion*, Prefect Du had noted that the women were also gathering mulberry leaves. Flowering mulberry trees were commonly planted on the berms between rice paddies. And their leaves are what the sericulturist—or silkworm grower—would feed to silkworms.

Woman gathering mulberry leaves

- Silkworms are moth larvae. They start out as tiny eggs of the *Bombyx mori* moth, so small that 30,000 eggs weigh just an ounce. These are incubated in a warm, humid environment until they hatch. The larvae are then transferred to bamboo trays and covered in protective gauze.

- This is where the mulberry leaves come in. For three or four weeks, the silkworms gorge themselves on the leaves, growing until they are about two inches long.

- It takes 160 pounds of mulberry leaves for every pound of silk thread. Every few days, the women and girls who attend to them must shift thousands of silkworm larvae to clean bamboo trays and add fresh mulberry leaves. The waste is collected for fertilizer.

- The well-fed larvae are then painstakingly transferred from their feeding trays to bamboo lattices, where they spin cocoons of fine silk filament. A small percentage of the cocoons are allowed to mature into moths to harvest eggs for the next go-round.

- The rest are baked—to kill the chrysalis—and then plunged into boiling water to soften the filament, so workers can start to unwind the cocoons. This is incredibly fine work, done over boiling water and repeated thousands of times. The trick is to find the end of a filament and start to unwind the cocoon in the exact reverse of how it was spun. These fine filaments can be up to 3,000 feet long.

- Once a worker gets five to eight filaments started, the worker spins them into fine thread that is collected on reels positioned over the work surface. About 3,000 cocoons will produce a pound of silk thread.

- The reeled silk is then washed, bleached, and dried. In traditional sericulture, the thread is dyed before it's woven, with dyes made from natural pigments: indigo for blue, sappan wood for red, and jackfruit for yellow.

- As with tea, a peasant family had the option to sell its product to a commercial processor. But many households kept at least part of the yield to weave clothing and bedding, and as a potential source of additional income.

- In this cottage industry, women were responsible for most phases of production, especially the loom work and the embroidery of finished silk. Centuries later, when cotton was introduced, female labor found another productive outlet, although men too participated in imperial China's cloth industry, challenging Prefect Du's idealized image of the division of labor.

SUGGESTED READING

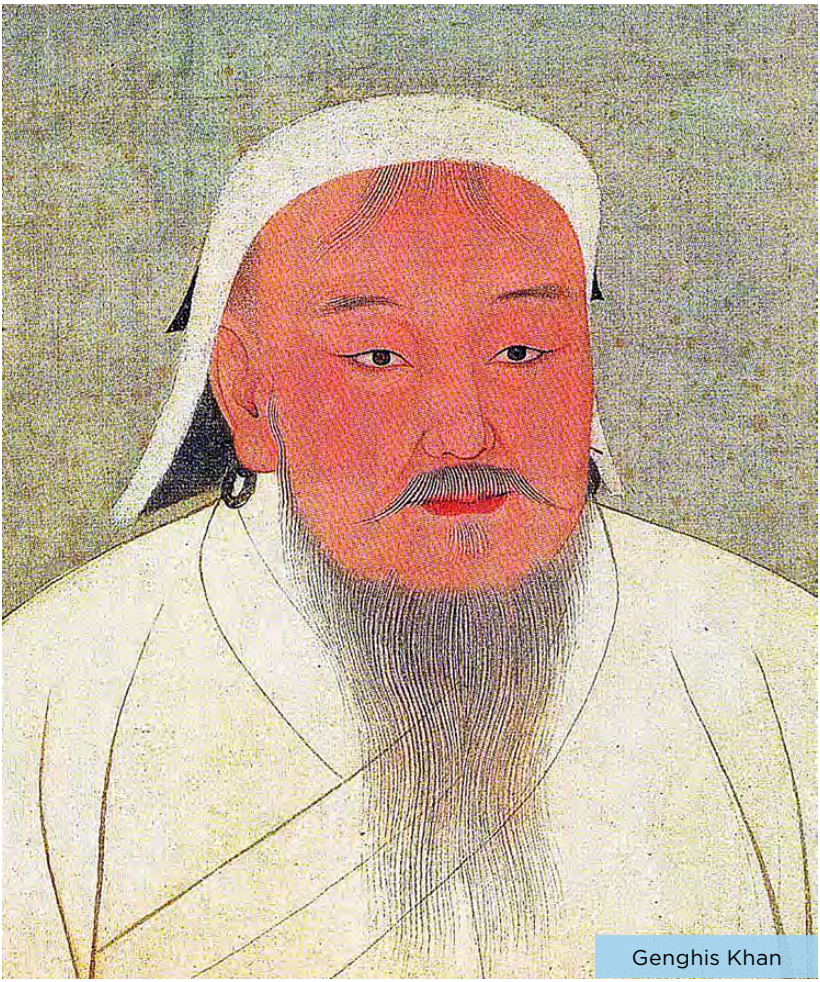
Benn, *Tea in China*.
Kuhn, *The Age of Confucian Rule*.
Mair and Hoh, *The True History of Tea*.
Marks, *Tigers, Rice, Silk, and Silt*.
Perdue, *Exhausting the Earth*.
Rawski, *Agricultural Change and the Peasant Economy of South China*.
Smith, *Taxing Heaven's Storehouse*.
Von Glahn, *The Country of Streams and Grottoes*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- How did the farming life in South China differ from that along the Yellow River?
- How did commercialization affect the lives of peasants in South China?
- How did wet-rice cultivation impact the geography and environment of South China?
- Why were multigenerational households so prevalent in South China?
- Why could imperial China sustain such a huge and almost constantly growing population?

Lecture 13

GENGHIS KHAN AND THE RISE OF THE MONGOLS



Genghis Khan

The boy who would become the conqueror Genghis Khan was originally named Temujin. His name belonged to a Tatar warrior killed by the boy's father, Yesugei, just before his son's birth. The father was a minor chieftain in a loose tribal coalition divided into two factions, known as the black boned and the white boned. They were precursors to the people we know as the Mongols. The white-bone Mongols were herders of the Kherlen Valley. The black-bone Mongols—Temujin's kin—were the less well-off hunter-gatherers of the Onon Valley. This lecture takes a look at Temujin's rise and evolution into Genghis Khan.

THE STEPPE

- Everything we know about Temujin comes from *The Secret History of the Mongols*, compiled by Temujin's adopted son, Shigi. It's not objective history. Rather, it's a study in leadership akin to Machiavelli's *The Prince* combined with an origin myth like Virgil's *Aeneid*.

- Temujin's birth occured nearly 1,000 years ago in forbidding terrain: the steppe. The steppe is the polar opposite of the area that it borders to the south known as the sown. Moreover, the million or so people who inhabited the steppe in the 12th century couldn't be more different from the tens of millions who inhabited the sown—especially the Chinese empire.

- The steppe is the vast band of rolling grasslands stretching from Manchuria to Hungary. The sown is the zone of extensive and intensive sedentary agriculture that was the foundation of imperial China, home to large, unified, stable, and long-lived states.

- On the steppe, there were no farming villages or roads connecting them. There were no permanent structures, market towns, cities, great public works, or bureaucracy. Also lacking were written language and a scholar class. There were crafts, but no art.

- What law there was existed as unwritten custom. Any collective memory was orally transmitted, as were history and literature. *The Secret History of the Mongols* was the first exception.

- While China in the 12th century had the world's largest economy, the steppe was almost prehistoric. Livestock, horses, furs, and hides were the sole exports. Everything else—that is, anything farm grown or manufactured—was imported from the sown. Yet steppe warriors would conquer China.

THE MONGOLS

- Temujin was born in 1162. As a child, Temujin learned to ride and to hunt. As nomads, the steppe's residents followed the seasons. Horsemanship was critical to herding and raiding, the two fundamental occupations of the steppe. Mongol children also mastered archery. Every male was a warrior by the end of his teens.

- A Mongol warrior's kit was rudimentary. It consisted of plain trousers, a heavy double-breasted coat called a deel, a pair of leather or felt boots, and a fur or felt hat. His weapons included a sword and dagger for close fighting, a spear and perhaps a short halberd, and a bow.

- A small percentage of horsemen wore heavy armor and rode armored steeds, but the core of the Mongol army was always the light cavalry. These young men of the steppe were far from the best-equipped army of their time, but they had two advantages: their horses and their bows.

- Mongol ponies were small and wiry—and exceptionally well trained. On campaign, a rider would have a string of three to five ponies, which meant that by shifting mounts, a rider could cover 100 miles a day.

- Mongol bows are composite recurve bows. These were powerful weapons with a pull (the strength needed to draw it) of 100–170 pounds and a killing range of 200–350 yards.

Depiction of a Mongol warrior from Genghis Khan: The Exhibition

TEMUJIN'S EARLY DAYS

- As a boy, young Temujin had a problem. Yesugei had two wives: a first wife named Sochigel and a second wife named Hoelun, who was Temujin's mother. Both women had borne sons; Sochigel's son, Begter, was slightly older than Temujin.

- Sensing the potential for a sibling rivalry, Yesugei decided to marry Temujin off to another clan at age nine. The engagement was to a girl named Borte. Temujin developed a deep affection for Borte.

- Custom called for the prospective groom to live with his future wife's family. That was to be Temujin's fate. But Yesugei—on his way home from leaving Temujin with Borte's family—was poisoned by some Tatar rivals.

- Hearing the news, Temujin abandoned his new family and rushed home. He was too late. Yesugei was dead. Yesugei's clan decided that his widows and orphans were a burden and abandoned them.

- As eldest male, Begter had the right to marry Hoelun and become head of the family. Temujin would have none of it. He and a younger brother, Khasar, ambushed Begter and killed him. True to steppe tradition, they left the corpse to rot in the open.

- Temujin had made friends with a youth named Jamuka, from one of the white-boned clans. The youngsters declared themselves blood brothers; their friendship and later feud would shape Temujin's rise.

- With Begter's death, Temujin was head of household. But if this family was to survive, it needed some essentials: brides, horses and livestock, and yurts—or more accurately, gers, the felt tents that would house followers of Temujin.

MORE DEVELOPMENTS

- Temujin had abruptly left his bride's family seven years earlier, yet Borte's kin honored the arrangement when he retrieved her. Their wedding gift was a beautiful black sable cloak. Temujin in turn presented the cloak to his father's blood brother, Toghrul Ong Khan, leader of the Kereyid tribe. With this gesture, Temujin made a powerful ally.

- Temujin and Borte returned to Temujin's clan, but their happiness was short-lived. Merkid warriors raided their camp and abducted Borte. This was revenge for Yesugei's earlier abduction of Temujin's mother.

- Temujin had to get Borte back, and he had his own blood brother, Jamuka—now a chieftain in his own right—to help him. Their combined raid was a huge success. They routed the Merkids, stole their animals, and rescued Borte. Temujin's small clan was now attached to Jamuka's entourage.

- From Jamuka, Temujin learned steppe warfare: livestock raiding, plunder, and kidnapping. The blood brothers raided northern tribes for livestock and horses and southern tribes for fine finished goods imported from imperial China.

- After two years, Temujin struck off on his own, taking some of Jamuka's followers with him. This began a 25-year feud between the boyhood friends.

TEMUJIN AND ONG KHAN

- Within a decade—by the year 1189—Temujin had become a khan himself, but only a minor one. He was still a vassal of his father's friend, Ong Khan. In 1196, Temujin and Ong Khan engaged in the most successful raid in steppe history. Their target was the Tatars, who were rich in herds and in the fine silks and rich brocades of China.

- They didn't just defeat the Tatars; it was genocide. Temujin—as vengeance for his murdered father—had the Tatar men slaughtered and the women and children enslaved.

- Temujin would later realize that this kind of slaughter was counterproductive. In future wars on the steppe—first against the Jurkin, then the Naimans, followed by the Kereyids, and finally against the hated Merkids—Temujin executed only the leaders, while systematically integrating the warriors and their families into his new modular military units.

- As he absorbed more tribes, Temujin made a point of taking their young women as wives, and adopting their young men as sons. In essence, he was creating a new tribe.

- Soon after the Tatar raid, the simmering feud between Temujin and his boyhood friend Jamuka degenerated into open warfare. They met in 1201 at the Battle of Koyitan, where Temujin's followers—still allied with Ong Khan's Kereyid confederation—defeated Jamuka.

Genghis Khan and Wang Khan

- But Ong Khan was beginning to view Temujin as a threat. In 1202, he attacked. Temujin barely escaped, but even in defeat, Temujin's followers remained loyal. Within a year, Temujin had defeated his former protector and absorbed the Kereyids. In 1204, he defeated Jamuka for a second time; that victory allowed Temujin to absorb another confederation, the Naiman.

- Temujin offered the vanquished Jamuka a truce. Jamuka chose a warrior's death instead. Temujin had his men break the back of his blood brother.

- That same year, Temujin inflicted a final defeat on the Merkids, the object of his lifelong blood feud. This was the only foe standing between him and the unification of what is now Mongolia.

Enthronement of Genghis Khan,with his sons, circa 1430.

- Temujin wiped out the Merkid elite and absorbed their rank-and-file soldiers. His forces now included 200,000 gers, millions of horses, and tens of millions of stock animals. In 1206, at the age of 44, Temujin was acclaimed Genghis Khan—essentially the khan of all khans. He began to call his followers the Yeke Mongol Ulus, which means the Great Nation of the Felt Walls, a reference to their iconic felt tents.

MOVES AS GENGHIS

- As the Mongol tribe grew in size and success, so did its appetite for products of more sedentary civilizations. Consequently, Genghis's gaze fell on China. At this point, two non-Chinese dynasties ruled what is now North China. They were the Tangut Xi Xia in China's northwest and the Jurchen Jin dynasty in the northeast.

Battle between Mongols and Chinese (1211)

- Genghis invaded Xi Xia in 1209 and made the Tangut emperor his vassal. This put the Mongols in control of the eastern reaches of the Silk Road, with its rich caravans.

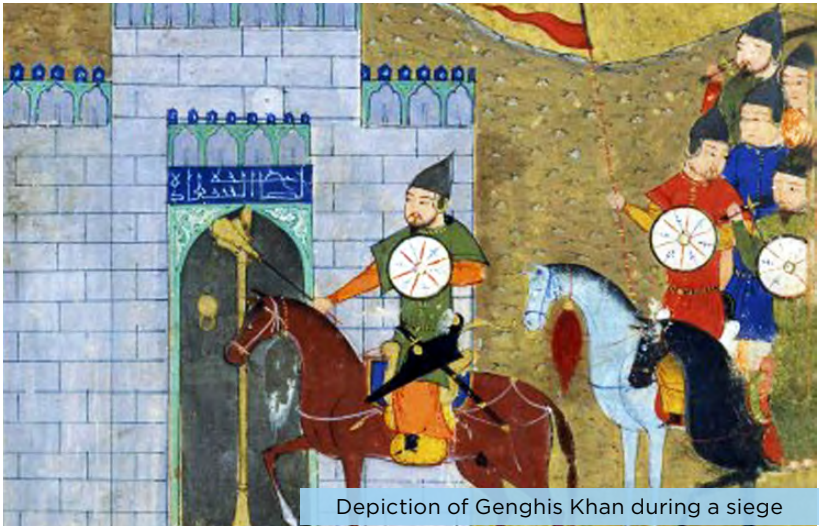
- That same year, in the northeast, the new Jurchen Jin emperor made a fateful blunder. The Jin emperor expected the obeisance of the upstart Mongol khan. Genghis bristled at a condescending message delivered by the Jin ambassador. He planned another invasion.

- The Mongols stormed into the Jurchen homeland in Manchuria, routed the Jin army, and laid siege to the Jin capital, Zhongdu, which today is Beijing. Genghis put his adopted son Shigi in charge of inventorying and distributing the plunder.

- Thousands of pack animals shipped tons of bullion, millions of yards of cloth, and countless bronzes and porcelains back to the steppe. Additionally, thousands of Chinese craftspeople were enslaved and transported to the steppe.

- The Khan, too, appreciated talent, and this is where the fascinating figure of Yelu Chucai comes into the picture. Yelu was a Khitan, a Turkic people. In 1218, Genghis summoned the 28-year-old Khitan aristocrat to his court.

- He was also a shaman, a diviner who practiced the ancient art of scapulimancy. Scapulimancy is the reading of omens on shoulder blades. It involves inscribing a weighty question on the scapula: Will the queen bear a son? Will we conquer our foes?



Depiction of Genghis Khan during a siege

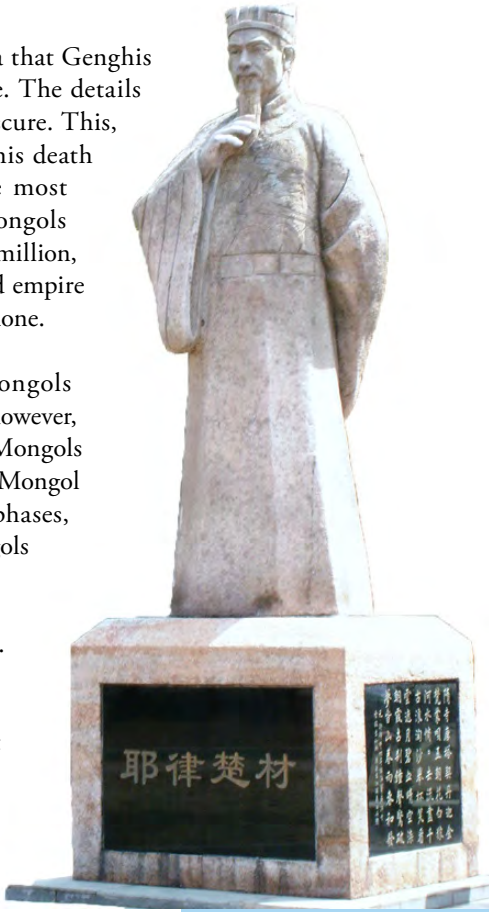
- Then, the diviner sticks a hot iron into a hole in the shoulder blade, causing it to crack. The diviner then reads the cracks to determine how the gods have answered. The Mongols always cast a divination before a battle and before any major decision. A skilled diviner was worth his weight in gold.

- Genghis entrusted Yelu with the rule of North China, and Yelu's primary objective became to spare the region from the destructive wrath of his Mongol bosses. He was fortunate because the Mongols had just shifted their energies back toward the Xi Xia.

- It was on campaign against Xi Xia that Genghis suffered a fatal fall from his horse. The details of his death and burial remain obscure. This, however, is clear: At the time of his death in 1227, Genghis Khan was the most powerful man on earth. The Mongols never numbered more than 1 or 2 million, but they controlled the largest land empire in history, and they were far from done.

- Some of the areas that the Mongols conquered never recovered. China, however, was spared some of the worst the Mongols could dish out. That's because the Mongol conquest of China proceeded in phases, and each phase required the Mongols to adopt more Chinese institutions.

- This wasn't always an easy sell. Ogedei Khan—who succeeded Genghis—wanted to turn North China into pasture. That meant killing or driving out the millions of farmers who lived there.



Yelu Chucai

- Yelu Chucai appealed to the Mongols' greed, and his argument was simple: "You can kill a farmer and take his meager belongings only once. But you could tax him regularly for the rest of his life." Yelu won the day, and Ogedei spared North China.

- By the time Kublai Khan—Genghis's grandson—completed the conquest of China in 1279, it was with enormous numbers of Chinese infantry and with a largely Chinese navy. This was an army and navy that were paid and equipped through a Chinese-style bureaucracy.

SUGGESTED READING

Barfield, *The Perilous Frontier*.
Brook, *The Troubled Empire*.
Cleaves, ed., *The Secret History of the Mongols*.
Dardess, *Conquerors and Confucians*.
Weatherford, *Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What do you think were the most significant differences between daily life on the steppe and daily life in the sown?

- How was Temujin able to overcome the deeply ingrained tribal identities of the people we now know as the Mongols?

- What was the economic relationship between the steppe and the sown?

- What motivated the Mongols to conquer sedentary civilizations, like China?

- Why do you think Yelu Chucai was able to convince the Mongols to adopt Chinese institutions?

Lecture 14

THE MONGOLS AND MARCO POLO IN XANADU

The Pax Mongolica, or great Mongol peace, lasted from the death of Genghis Khan in 1227 to the outbreak of the Black Death in the 1340s. It brought trade and cross-cultural communications to unprecedented levels, including technology transfers such as movable type, paper money, gunpowder, and the blast furnace, all of which made their way from Asia to Europe.

SETTING THE STAGE

- The peak of Pax Mongolica came during the reign of Genghis Khan's grandson Kublai Khan, in the second half of the 13th century. The Mongol tide had ebbed significantly by that point and the empire was divided into four khanates.

- Kublai was the Great Khan, ruling Mongolia and China in what is called the Yuan dynasty. Alongside the Great Khan was the Chagatai Khan in Central Asia, the Il-Khan in Persia and the Middle East, and the Golden Horde in Russia and Eastern Europe.

- The Mongols frequently squabbled. But relations between the khanates were friendly enough to enable what some would call the first phase of globalization.

- In the popular imagination, the most famous occupants of the Pax Mongolica were the famous Polo family of Venetian merchants: Marco, his father Niccolo, and Marco's uncle Maffeo. For centuries, Venetian traders had been intermediaries between Asia and Europe, and Marco Polo's amazing travel tales inspired images of splendor, opulence, and excess.

- Marco Polo didn't have to exaggerate the wealth, power, and economic sophistication of imperial China under the Mongols. Keep in mind that Europe was just emerging from the Dark Ages. It was still far behind China in terms of technology, population, agricultural productivity, and military power.

TRAVEL

- Marco Polo and his peers traveled the length and breadth of the Pax Mongolica and recorded their experiences. These incredible journeys required some enabling mechanisms.

- The first crucial enabler was the communications infrastructure of the Mongol empire, known as the Yam. The Yam was a vast web of postal stations, wayside hostels, and messenger relays.

- Relying on horses (as well as foot power and water power), the Yam moved people and transmitted information. The efficiency and extent of the system explains how Marco Polo and his peers could have seen so much of the Mongol empire.

The Catalan Atlas's depiction of Marco Polo traveling east

- Horse-courier stations—strung out every 25 or 30 miles—were maintained and operated by about 25 resident families and overseen by the ministry of war, a clear indicator of their importance. Riders quickly refreshed and changed mounts at these stations. Station masters were expected to take diligent care of the horses and make sure they were not overworked.

- According to Marco Polo, a rider with an urgent message could cover 250 miles a day. Major news—like the death of Genghis's heir Ogodei Khan—reached Mongol commanders in Europe in four weeks.

- Runners hand-carried messages over shorter distances. Although weighed down by belts of brass bells to announce their approach, they were said to cover three miles at a sprint. The Chinese portion of the Yam was particularly well developed. The Mongols also made excellent use of China's already vast canal system and its extensive road network.

- Polo and his peers could use the Yam because they enjoyed the protection of at least one of the four Khans. Protection came from the issuance of a *paizi*, which is a long medallion made of wood, silver, or gold, reflecting the traveler's rank and the degree of imperial favor. A paizi allowed its bearer to rest at postal stations and eat at government expense. Senior emisarries could even requisition horses but were advised not to abuse the privilege.

TOLERANCE

- Many of Marco Polo's peers were missionaries. And as it turns out, the Mongols—despite their demonic reputation—were quite religiously tolerant. The Great Khan's absolute certainty in the supremacy of his God—and his absolute faith in his own divine sanction—was reflected in his incredible brutality: He was expressing God's wrath.

- That absolute faith was also reflected in his toleration of those who worshipped lesser gods. A divinely confident Khan could afford to be benevolent toward foreign visitors.

The first Mughal emperor Babur and his heir Humayun, circa 1650

- Not all Mongols were disciples of Tenggeri, also known as the Great God of the Sky. Kublai—the most cosmopolitan of the Khans—counted Muslims, Buddhists, Zoroastrians, and Nestorian Christians among his kin and courtiers. And he was willing to revere Moses, Christ, Muhammad, and Buddha. The most powerful man on the planet could afford to be tolerant.

- In addition, the Mongols were practical people. Merchants, artisans, and able administrators were valued, regardless of where they came from or what gods they worshipped. Intolerance would have been counterproductive.

Conversion of Ghazan to Islam

- When it came to ruling this vast empire, foreign expertise was at a premium. Administration was never a Mongol strong suit. They were happy to farm it out. In some cases, using outsiders fit Mongol priorities. Who better to run the salt monopoly in China than a Persian or Turkic administrator who owed everything to a Mongol ruler?

- When it came to foreign enclaves, the Mongols found it useful to let foreigners govern themselves. For example, Marco Polo claimed that he served as a tax collector in Yangzhou, a major commercial center on the Grand Canal. That has raised some skepticism: What sort of qualifications would he have had for such a position? It's more likely that he was the tax collector for the largely self-governing Italian enclave in Yangzhou.

THE POLOS

- The experiences of the Polos and their peers highlight the multi-culturalism, pragmatic governance, sophisticated communications infrastructure, and the complex diplomatic dynamics that marked the Pax Mongolica.

- Niccolo and Maffeo Polo made their way from Venice to Constantinople and then through Central Asia to China in the middle of the 13th century. In 1266, they were received by Kublai at his great capital, Khanbaliq.

- The Khan's palace complex had its fair share of fancy halls and audience chambers. But its heart was an immense game park (the steppe in miniature), where the Khan could get back to his nomadic roots, sleep in a ger, and hunt animals.

- The Polos spent a year in Khanbaliq before returning home with a letter from the Khan to the pope. Kublai wanted information about the Catholic world, and he asked for oil from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

- The brothers arrived back in Venice in 1269. They set out again in 1271 with the pope's reply. This time, the 17-year-old Marco joined them. He was 41 before he saw Venice again.

- According to Marco's account, he arrived in China over land, by way of Central Asia's caravan networks. His journey home two decades later began with a two-year voyage, by sea, from China to Hormuz.

Kublai giving support to the Venetians

MONTECORVINO AND ODORIC

- While Marco was sailing for home in the 1290s, Giovanni da Montecorvino—a Franciscan from Campania—arrived in Zaitun, which is modern-day Quanzhou. Montecorvino came through the South China Sea from Bengal to what is now Fujian province.

- Montecorvino was a missionary, and he received permission from Temur Khan (Kublai's grandson) to build two churches in Khanbaliq. Over the course of his ministry, he bought 150 local boys from destitute families. He taught them Latin and Greek. Together with these acolytes, he eventually converted another 6000 followers. The converts included Chinese, Armenians, and people from the modern Caucasus.

- In 1307, Pope Clement V named Montecorvino archbishop of Khanbaliq, and sent several priests to help him extend his mission back down to the Fujian coast to the ports of Amoy and Zaitun.

- Montecorvino was followed by Father Odoric of Pordenone, who explored coastal China and visited the former Southern Song Capital at Hangzhou. This was a city that he—like Polo—described as the greatest emporium on earth.

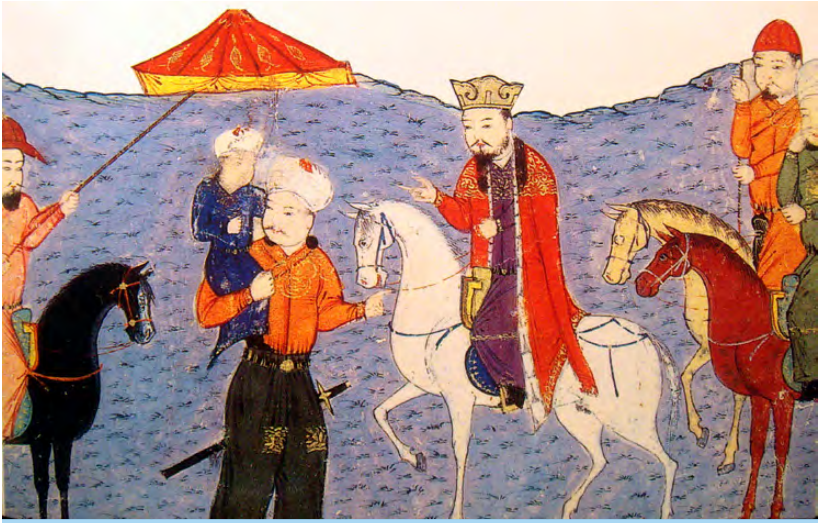
RABBAN BAR SAUMA

- The journeys of European missionaries are impressive, but those of the Nestorian priest and diplomat Rabban Bar Sauma easily match them. Rabban was of Uighur descent, born near Khanbaliq around 1220. In the 1260s, he set out on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. He didn't make it, but did spend years traveling and studying in what is now Iran and Iraq.

- In 1287, Bar Sauma was recruited by Arghun Khan, the ruler of the Il-Khanate in Persia, to be his ambassador to Europe. Arghun Khan wanted to cement an alliance with Europe's Christian kings against the Muslims who occupied the Holy Land.

- Rabban Bar Sauma's diplomatic overtures didn't get much traction, but he was warmly received in the courts of Europe. The Byzantine emperor welcomed him, as did the kings of Naples and Sicily. He spent a month enjoying the hospitality of King Philip the IV of France, and made the acquaintance of England's Edward the First.

- On Palm Sunday in 1288, Bar Sauma—a Uyghur Priest from North China—received communion from Pope Nicholas the IV in Rome. This was quite a moment, considering Rome had once declared Nestorianism heresy. Apparently, good relations with the Mongols were more important than doctrinal disputes.



Arghun Khan (standing, holding his son Ghazan) under a royal umbrella

GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

- In 1951, workers demolishing the Yangzhou city wall unearthed the tombstone of Caterina Vilioni, a young Venetian woman and daughter of the famous merchant Domenico Vilioni. The Vilionis' commercial network stretched from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea, to Persia, and beyond to China.

- Caterina died in June of 1342. Soon after Caterina's tombstone was found, workers discovered the tombstone of her brother Antonio, who had died in 1344. This reveals that there was a community of Italian families in Medieval Yangzhou living side by side with Chinese, Arabs, Persians, and Central Asians.

- When the Mongols were driven out of China by the new Ming dynasty in the 1360s, most of these foreign enclaves were expelled. That marked the end of a unique stretch of world history.

- The Pax Mongolica didn't just stretch overland along the Silk Road. The sea voyages of Montecorvino and Odoric and the enclaves of Venetians and Genoese demonstrated how deeply daily life in medieval China was connected to the wider world by sea.

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Bergeen, *Marco Polo*.
Brook, *The Troubled Empire*.
Gernet, *Daily Life in China on the Eve of the Mongol Invasion*.
Haw, *Marco Polo's China*.
Lane, *Daily Life in the Mongol Empire*.
Langlois, ed., *China under Mongol Rule*.
Odoric and Chiesa, *The Travels of Friar Odoric*.
Rachewiltz, et al., eds., *In the Service of the Khan*.
Rockhill, trans., *The Journey of William of Rubruck to the Eastern Parts of the World*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What explains the Mongols' religious tolerance? Why would the Khan tolerate Christians proselytizing in his domains?
- Why might the Khan entrust the administration of the Chinese part of the empire to non-Chinese?
- What were the demographic, the technological and economic consequences of the Mongol conquests?
- Why were the rulers of Europe so welcoming to Rabban Bar Sauma?
- What sort of people might you encounter in medieval Yangzhou or Hangzhou?

Lecture 15

ADMIRAL ZHENG HE'S TREASURE FLEET

From 1405 to 1433, the Ming dynasty admiral Zheng He made seven voyages into the Indian Ocean. The scope of these voyages is impressive. Perhaps 250 ships participated in one voyage alone. They included the largest wooden ships ever constructed. This lecture examines the journeys of treasure ships as they plied the Indian Ocean on the way to the Horn of Africa. The two men principally responsible for these expeditions were the Yongle Emperor and his confidante Zheng He.

Admiral Zheng He

YONGLE'S DRIVE

- Here's a look at a typical fleet: A typical *bao chuan*, or treasure ship, measured around 440 feet long and 180 feet wide. These were neither sleek nor fast, but they didn't have to be. Forty to 60 of these behemoths would travel together, supported by hundreds of smaller vessels. The total crew came to 27,000 men.

- This fleet was the brainchild of one of the most ambitious rulers in Chinese history: the Yongle Emperor, who came to power in 1399. He moved the empire's seat of power from Nanjing to Beijing in 1421.

- The epic voyages of his treasure fleet were perfectly in ambitious character. To command his fleet, Yongle chose one of his most trusted subordinates, the warrior Zheng He.

- Zheng He was born in Yunnan in China's distant southwest. As a boy, he'd been taken prisoner during the Ming conquest of the region. He was castrated and assigned to serve in the retinue of Yongle (then known as Zhu Di) before he rose in revolt and seized the throne.

THE FLEET

- At Nanjing's shipyards, 30,000 workers hewed ironwood, pine, and camphor into 62 treasure ships in the years between 1402 and 1405. The first treasure fleet sailed in 1405. This was an epic feat of naval construction.

- When it came to sailing, the toughest job for the crew was hoisting the immense sails. A treasure ship had nine masts arrayed in a fan-like pattern. Most sailing vessels have masts footed into a center-aligned keel, but a treasure ship's 90-foot masts are stepped into transverse bulkheads, so they don't stand in a single line.

- The individual sails of a treasure ship were so heavy that hundreds of men were needed to haul on the lines. Even at full sail on all nine masts, a treasure ship could only achieve a speed of two or three knots. But they were an amazing sight: dozens of ships longer than an American football field, flying millions of square feet of red silk, swarmed by hundreds of smaller vessels.

- The crew contained military personnel expected to man the cannons on the fleet's gunships and to disembark and fight on land if called upon. On his third expedition, Zheng He personally commanded 2,000 men, marched on the capital of Sri Lanka, and dethroned its king.

- Jobs on board were numerous. Someone might spend their time mucking stalls or shoeing horses for the cavalry. There were also carpenters, sail makers, painters, cooks, butchers, and bakers. Beyond that, physicians, astronomers, navigators, secretaries, record keepers, translators, and diplomats joined these voyages. And the fleet played host to foreign ambassadors and royalty.

Depiction of Zheng He's fleet at the Cheng Ho Cultural Museum

THE FLEET'S GOAL

- The treasure fleet's goal wasn't discovery or to establish colonies. Instead, the fleet fanned out to advertise the glories of the Ming dynasty and the power of its new emperor. It also aimed to smooth, expand, and extend the axes along which Ming China's economic and cultural power could be felt.

- Zheng He distributed treasure to demonstrate the wealth and beneficence of his emperor. And he collected treasure—in the form of tribute —to demonstrate the Ming's gravitational pull.

- All seven of Zheng He's voyages began at Nanjing, on the Yangtze River. The treasure ships would assemble in late summer or early fall. Sacrifices were made and prayers offered to Tianhou, the patron goddess of sailors. The personnel paid homage to the emperor. The fleet would then make its way 400 miles down the Yangtze to Liujiagang, where the treasure ships were joined by the support fleet.

- Then, once organized into discrete sub-commands, the fleet would sail down China's southeast coast. Finally, in late December or early January, the winter monsoon would begin to blow out of the northeast. The monsoon is a consistent trade wind that controlled the sailing schedule of the treasure fleet.

- The first foreign stop was Qui Nhon, the main port of the kingdom of Champa. Champa was supporting the Ming effort to annex Annam, the northern part of present-day Vietnam. From Qui Nhon, the fleet sailed for Java, navigating by the pole star and tracking its progress against a detailed map of coastal landmarks.

- From Java, Zheng He would make his way from port to port along the eastern shore of Sumatra, transiting the strategic Strait of Malacca. Emerging into the Bay of Bengal, the voyage entered its most daunting stage: a three-week, open-ocean passage to Sri Lanka.

- From Sri Lanka, the fleet moved on to Calicut on the west coast of India, where trade was the order of the day. Locals traded precious stones, pearls, coral, and pepper for Chinese silks, porcelain, lacquerware, gold, silver, and exquisitely crafted musical instruments.

- Then, as the monsoon winds shifted to blow out of the southwest in April, the treasure fleet reversed course and sailed home, arriving in either late summer or early fall. On the return journey, the admiral would welcome aboard as many as 30 ambassadors seeking the favor of the Ming emperor.

LATER VOYAGES

- On the fourth voyage, departing in 1413, the ultimate destination was the trading port of Hormuz at the entrance to the Persian Gulf. At Hormuz, the fleet took aboard the riches of the Muslim world, including lions, leopards, and Arabian horses. Zheng He also persuaded a group of merchants from Mogadishu and Malindi to return with him to China.

- Meanwhile, Admiral Yang Min sailed a flotilla to Bengal, bringing back its king and a giraffe. The fifth voyage sailed in the winter of 1417 and returned the Bengali king and various ambassadors to their homes.

- After stopping at Hormuz, the fleet coasted along the Arabian Peninsula, and stopped at Aden in modern-day Yemen, where Zheng

Painting of the giraffe from Bengal

He was warmly received by the sultan. From there, Zheng sailed for the Horn of Africa and paid visits to Mogadishu and Malindi, returning the merchants. He made stops at Brava and Mombasa.

- On the return voyage, Zheng He took on board African and Arab emissaries and their gifts of exotic animals. Many rulers were eager to pay homage to the Ming emperor. Yongle was likely pleased by the tribute from so many foreign rulers and proud of the achievements of his trusted lieutenant, Zheng He.

PROBLEMS

- Yongle was the worst enemy of his own maritime ambitions. His multiple projects—the failed annexation of Annam, the costly repairs to the Grand Canal, an extraordinary new capital, and his military campaigns against the Mongols—all competed for Ming resources and strategic focus.

- Yongle's 1421 Mongolian offensive provoked a storm of controversy, forcing the abbreviation of Zheng He's sixth voyage. Undeterred and true to form, Yongle died on campaign in Mongolia in 1424.

Bronze statue of the Yongle Emperor

- By moving the capital from Nanjing, near the coast, to Beijing, on the northern frontier, Yongle had essentially forced his heirs to choose between containing the Mongols or influencing the maritime world.

- And a refurbished Grand Canal meant that grain from the fertile south could be transported internally to feed the new capital and the northern garrisons. This deemphasized seaborne trade and naval power. Yongle's son, who took the throne in September 1424 was also hostile to his father's ambitious schemes, as were many civil officials.

- In 1431, Yongle's grandson, the Xuande Emperor, sent Zheng He on one final voyage. It was a nostalgic nod to his ancestor's vision, and he did so over the protests of his own officials. Many identify the end of the voyages as a fundamental shift away from the sea. Neither the Ming, nor its successor, the Qing dynasty, seems to have taken much interest in extending the empire's influence across the ocean.

END OF THE VOYAGES

- The extent of the Ming retreat from the sea is overstated, as are assessments of the severity and effectiveness of later controls on maritime trade. If anything, Yongle's successors realized the folly of trying to inject the state into ungovernable world of maritime trade. The Ming liked overseas trade and allowed private commerce to reassert itself in the sector, albeit under a state licensing system.

- Zheng He had made sure that the strategic ports of the Malacca strait were in friendly hands. That was one mission accomplished. And while the Chinese state may have retreated, the Chinese people never abandoned the sea. The trade between China and Southeast Asia and over the Indian Ocean never stopped.

Modern-day view of the Yangtze River

- Zheng He's final voyage took place from 1431 to 1433. We don't know much about what happened to Zheng He's men, but we do know that some were handsomely rewarded. At least some of these men enjoyed their twilight years, regaling their often-incredulous friends and family with tales of distant lands and exotic animals.

- Zheng He erected a monument to their collective achievement at the Yangtze River port of Liujiagang. The stone inscription commemorating the voyage reads:

> We visited altogether more than thirty countries large and small ... traversed more than one hundred thousand li of immense water spaces and have beheld in the ocean huge waves like mountains rising sky-high, and we have set eyes on barbarian regions far away hidden in a blue transparency of light vapors, while our sails loftily unfurled like clouds day and night … traversing those savage waves as if we were treading a public thoroughfare.

SUGGESTED READING

Dreyer, *Zheng He*.
Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas*.
Menzies, *1421*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What motivated the Ming emperor to build and dispatch the treasure fleets? What do these voyages tell us about the emperor's vision of himself?
- What does the treasure fleet tell us about the state of technology and commercial development in Ming China?
- What might the arrival of the treasure fleet be like in one of the trading cities of Southeast Asia or the Indian Ocean?
- What would it have been like for a Chinese sailor to step ashore in East Africa?

CHINA'S BOUND FEET, BRIDES, AND WIDOWS

Three images stand in stark relief when examining the lives of women during China's late imperial era. First is the binding of a young girl's feet as passage into womanhood; her feet were mutilated to attract a husband. Second is the chaste widow and moral exemplar who was expected to be loyal to her late husband and his family until she died. And finally, there is the phenomenon of female infanticide, reflecting the cruel logic of the higher value of sons over daughters.

PATRILINES

- Chinese cultural mores emphasized the perpetuation of the patriline—the father's side of the family, carried on through his sons. Male heirs were crucially important for tradespeople and peasants, who depended on the labor of healthy sons.

- In elite families, the fixation on producing sons who could compete in the civil service exams—and secure positions in the government—verged on an obsession. And so, the survival—or potential ruin—of a family hung not only on the productivity of its sons, but also on the ability of these young men to attract productive and fertile brides. Accordingly, every significant event in a young woman's life had something to do with preparing her for marriage, for childrearing, and for serving her husband's family.

- When it came to raising a daughter, traditional, conservative mothers and fathers strove to make sure that she grew up to be a *guixiu*, that is, a cultivated young lady. From their point of view, she should've been polite, demure, and skilled at spinning, weaving, and embroidery. She should have known how to mill grain and prepare and preserve food.

- Ideally, she would also be educated— well versed in the prose and poetry of model women of the past and familiar with some of the many how-to manuals that were widely available.

FOOT BINDING AND OTHER MEASURES

- Careful note was taken of a female child's birth year, month, and day so that later she could be carefully matched to a fiancé. From that day forward, elite and common girls alike were raised to be chaste, disciplined, and hard-working.

- At about age six, a girl would have her hair tied up in tufts. Hair tying marked the beginning of preparation for foot binding, a gruesome measure. The girl's feet would be cleaned and her toenails trimmed to avoid cuts and infection. Infection and gangrene were common during the binding process.

- To begin, the four smaller toes were folded under, and strips of wet cotton cloth were wrapped around the forefoot. More cotton strips drew the heel forward—exaggerating the arch—and were stitched in place. As the cloth dried, it contracted, gradually breaking the bones of the arch. The girl's dressings would be changed every couple of days, drawing the foot tighter and tighter. Getting her feet to fit into the ideal three-inch-long lotus shoes could take months of binding.

- It's thought that this practice started among 10th-century court dancers, who bound their feet to dance *en pointe*—like modern ballerinas. Small feet became a sexual fetish in Chinese society. Sex manuals from the 18th century list four dozen ways to play with a bound foot.

- Tiny feet and a delicate gait were also crucial symbols of status and good breeding among elite women. The wealthy wrapped their tiny feet in the finest silks and clad them in elegant shoes featuring their finest embroidery.

- Some ethnic minorities rejected foot binding. But among the Han Chinese majority, it was almost universal by the 17th century, and not effectively banned until the 20th century.

A woman shows the effects of foot binding

- After foot binding, the next milestone in a young woman's life was hair pinning. This ritual marked the beginning of puberty, at which point a girl was ready for marriage. A womanly coiffure—held up with pins—now replaced the tufts of old.

- Even then, the anxious transition period from girlhood to womanhood was filled with all manner of training. Proper wifely behavior was drummed into the bride-to-be, including how to behave toward her husband, her mother-in-law and father-in-law, and other members of the husband's family, as well as toward servants.

- A vast body of manuals evolved, beginning with the Neo-Confucian philosopher Zhu Xi's *Family Rituals* in the 12th century. Many manuals were written by women and elaborated upon customary expectations of wifely and womanly behavior.

Portrait of a Chinese woman

MARRIAGE PLANNING

- Marriage planning began at birth, with the casting of horoscopes. A good match was so crucial that parents regularly engaged the services of a professional intermediary.

- To test the propitiousness of the match, the young woman's full name and precise moment of her birth was written on fancy red paper. The matchmaker then performed the *suanming*—or "calculating fate"—to make sure the couple's births were astrologically compatible and in cosmic balance.

- The particulars were then taken to the groom's home and placed on his ancestral altar. If for three days there were no inauspicious signs, the betrothal would proceed.

- One requisite of an arranged marriage was that the groom should possess a different surname than the bride. Many Chinese villages were single surname though, so chances were that a young woman would marry into a different village, and her wedding day might be the last day she spent in the village where she'd spent her entire life.

A Qing dynasty wedding

- Marriage wasn't about happiness so much as it was to extend interfamily alliances and perpetuate a husband's lineage. The gift of a dowry eased a bride's transition into her new household. It might include bedclothes, curtains, toilet items, plates, and cups. The dowry and bride price—the compensation given by the groom's family to the bride's— were exchanged in advance of the wedding and loudly and formally inventoried by each family.

- The ideal was a marriage between families of roughly equal social status. But the bride's family, even if poor, had leverage to negotiate an upwardly mobile pairing.

THE WEDDING

- A wedding might mark a young woman's formal subordination to her husband's patriline, but marriage rituals still called for the groom to honor her and her family. Rituals for the bride included a bath in scented water, wearing red clothing, and paying farewell to her parents and honoring her ancestors.

Marriage ceremony

- She'd have a ritual meal and then ride off in a sedan chair—a box carried by two to four men—to the groom's family home. The groom had rituals of his own, including a similar ride.

- Upon arrival, the bride would step over a wooden saddle, symbolizing peace and tranquility, and then over a charcoal brazier, as a final ritual cleansing.

- Only then could the groom lift her veil. This might be when the two got their first good look at each other. Tradition called for the couple to bow to the groom's parents, and to his ancestral altar, followed by toasts all around.

- The young bride was now a member of the groom's family. Her status would be determined by his place in the family hierarchy. She did, however, keep her family name, such that she may be known as Madame Wu, wife of Master Li. This marked the newest family member as something of an outsider and advertised the alliance just forged.

THE *GUIGE*

- If the family was well to do, the new bride moved into the inner quarters, or *guige*, at the back house, far removed from the outer courtyard and outside world. The *guige* housed all the extended family's wives, unmarried daughters, female attendants, and the youngest boys and girls. The most senior wife, who might be the groom's mother or grandmother or the wife of one of his older brothers, oversaw the *guige*.

- The *guige* could be miserable. It was here in the *guige* that girls' feet were crushed and distorted. We hear most about the unhappy state of the inner quarters from brothers and fathers whose consciences struck them as they received tortured letters from sisters and daughters trapped inside another family's home.

- Marriage was supposed to bind a wife to her husband's family for all time. For a woman trapped in a bad environment, suicide was often the only escape.

- If the marriage was a relatively happy one, the bride's mastery of the domestic arts made her an asset. Poor women sustained their families by spinning silk filament into thread, weaving simple garments for their kin, and selling thread and cloth at local markets. Wealthier women wove fine silks and did the fine embroidery an elite family was expected to wear.

- Many millions of women also toiled in the fields, in the burgeoning silk and cotton industries. Additionally, thousands of women composed poetry and prose, though a woman was supposed to write only after she'd completed her embroidery or weaving.

- Producing heirs was a woman's primary duty: preferably bright young boys who might pass the imperial exams, though daughters were needed, too, to cement marriage alliances.

WIDOWHOOD

- There was a significant chance that a woman would be widowed while still in her 20s or 30s, due to higher male mortality rates. A widow's options were limited. She could return to her parents and possibly remarry. But she'd have to leave her children with her husband's family.

- Social pressures imposed the ideal of the chaste widow who honored her husband's memory and stayed loyal to his family. One of neo-Confucianism's founders, Cheng Yi, said that it was better for a widow to starve to death than to remarry.

Cheng Yi

- As neo-Confucianism became the ordering principle of the Chinese family, chaste widows gained prominence. By the time of the Ming dynasty—from 1368 to 1644—tales of wifely loyalty proliferated. During the Qing dynasty—in the 17th to 20th centuries—came the cult of the chaste widow.

- This tradition of self-sacrifice and social restriction reflected wider social pressures to restrict the physical and social mobility of women. And the phenomenon was endorsed at the very top. Chaste widows who endured two decades of genteel celibacy won an imperial stipend.

- However, most women didn't fit neatly into orthodox neo-Confucian roles. Most widows remarried. And millions of women worked outside the home: plowing, sowing, and harvesting or working as shopkeepers, food vendors, and matchmakers. Buddhist nunneries, the entertainment industry, and the sex trade drew in millions more.

COURTESANS

- The same region that was so famous for its Confucian scholars and chaste widows was also known for its courtesans. The red-light districts of cities like Hangzhou, Yangzhou, and Suzhou were the stuff of legend. Courtesans were known for their entrancing company and sexual prowess, and commanded small fortunes.

- Courtesans owe much of their contemporary fame to the Ming and Qing literati who recorded the time spent in their company. That's the same educated class whose home life was ideally structured by family rituals that demanded that women conform to strict moral codes.

- Note that courtesans were located at the absolute top end of the vast—and often cruel—sex trade in imperial China. Common prostitutes were little more than slaves.

- The literati of Jiangnan were proud of the region's courtesans. But they were also deeply conflicted. That's because the women who commanded their affections, and their silver, typically remained tragic figures.

- These women matched the literary cultivation expected of elite wives, down to their bound feet. But they were unmoored from the family rituals that were supposed to anchor society largely by fixing women in relation to men.

SUGGESTED READING

Cao, *The Dream of the Red Chamber*.
Hsiung, *A Tender Voyage*.
Ko, *Cinderella's Sisters*.
———, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*.
Mann, *Precious Records*.
Shen, *Six Records of a Floating Life*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- How do the lives of Chinese women, their position in society, and the opportunities available compare to that of women in other traditional societies?
- What might explain the prevalence and persistence of foot binding in imperial China?
- What would it have been like to live with bound feet?
- What explains the chaste widow phenomenon?
- What might it be like to inhabit the "inner chambers" of a traditional Chinese home?

MING DYNASTY TRADE AND SPANISH SILVER

An explosion of global maritime trade began in the 16th century that was driven partly by the European demand side for foreign goods. That's the demand that drove Prince Henry's navigators around the Cape of Good Hope, and Columbus across the Atlantic. But European demand is only half the story. Without Chinese demand for European silver—and the fluke discovery of the Americas that gave Spain *tons* of silver to feed their appetite for China's exports—Europe's social and economic transformation (and the colonization of the Americas) would not have happened at the same speed, or in the same way. The Chinese demand side of that equation also explains certain transformations of daily life in imperial China that have come to define a great part of China's modern history.

CHINESE DEMAND FOR SILVER

- China's economy was bi-metallic, employing both copper cash and silver in ingots called taels. A tael weighed about 1.2 ounces and was worth much more than the equivalent amount of copper cash. But silver was chronically in short supply.

- During the Ming dynasty, the tax code was streamlined to facilitate collection, and all taxes were now paid in silver. Government expenditures were also made in silver, covering official salaries, the military, and massive public works like the Great Wall. That created a huge gravitational pull for world silver.

- In 1567, the Ming scrapped impossible-to-enforce foreign-trade restrictions. The Spanish set up shop in Manila four years later. They quickly found out the Chinese were ready, willing, and able to trade for American silver. Items the Chinese brought to table included silk, ivory, rubies, sapphires, crystal, metals, and gunpowder. Sino-Spanish trade exploded. After that, perhaps 600,000 pounds of silver passed through Manila each year.

- Manila wasn't unique. By the 17th century, there were large Chinese communities at the Dutch enclaves in Batavia and Taiwan, Portuguese Macao, Japan, and Malacca. These places rapidly became Euro-Asian hybrids.

SILK AND COTTON

- In response to new trade opportunites, coastal China's export market revved up. This was most evident in the silk industry, the cornerstone of the Manila trade.

- In Zhejiang province, near modern Shanghai, whole areas were given over to growing mulberry leaves for silkworms to eat. Some communities specialized in growing silk worms, others at unraveling cocoons and spooling silk thread, and others in weaving.

- Specialization also emerged in the new cotton industry. The old gender-specific ideal of agrarian labor—that men worked the fields while women worked the loom—broke down in 16th-century China. Entire households—men and women—mirrored the regional specializations. A family might grow mulberry leaves for sale to families that raised silkworms who sold to families that specialized in the reeling and spinning of silk thread.

Silk production

ECONOMIC PROBLEMS

- The massive influx of silver created such problems as inflation, income disparity, and corruption. When silver was plentiful, the tael's value fell relative to copper cash. This was akin to a tax cut paired with a cut in interest rates. A steep drop in the silver supply would mean a triple threat.

- If taxes and interest rates were to go up at the same time as the economy slowed, families who bet on silkworms would sink into debt, leaving the government in a financial bind. In response, the government might have to lay off lots of laborers and soldiers. The result could be rebellion.

- That nightmare scenario struck the Ming dynasty in the 1630s and brought about its collapse in 1644.

NEW CROPS

- The Spanish, with their vast quantities of silver, also brought New World crops to Asia, including sweet potatoes, peanuts, corn, and tobacco. Sweet and hot peppers of the capsicum family were totally unprecedented and added flavor and diversity to Chinese cuisine.

- The most important of the new crops were sweet potatoes and maize. Sweet potatoes were drought resistant and richer in calories than any other domestic crop. This root vegetable could be grown in previously unusable soil, saving prime land for cash crops.

- Chinese farmers started planting sweet potatoes in marginal soil, primarily for household consumption. But by the 1800s, it had become so prolific that it accounted for half of the food supply in many of China's poorer areas.

- American maize, or corn, enabled migrants from the overcrowded Jiangnan region south of the Yangtze River to start farming the hilly terrain of the inland provinces. Increasingly, they began to populate the southwest regions of Yunnan and Sichuan.

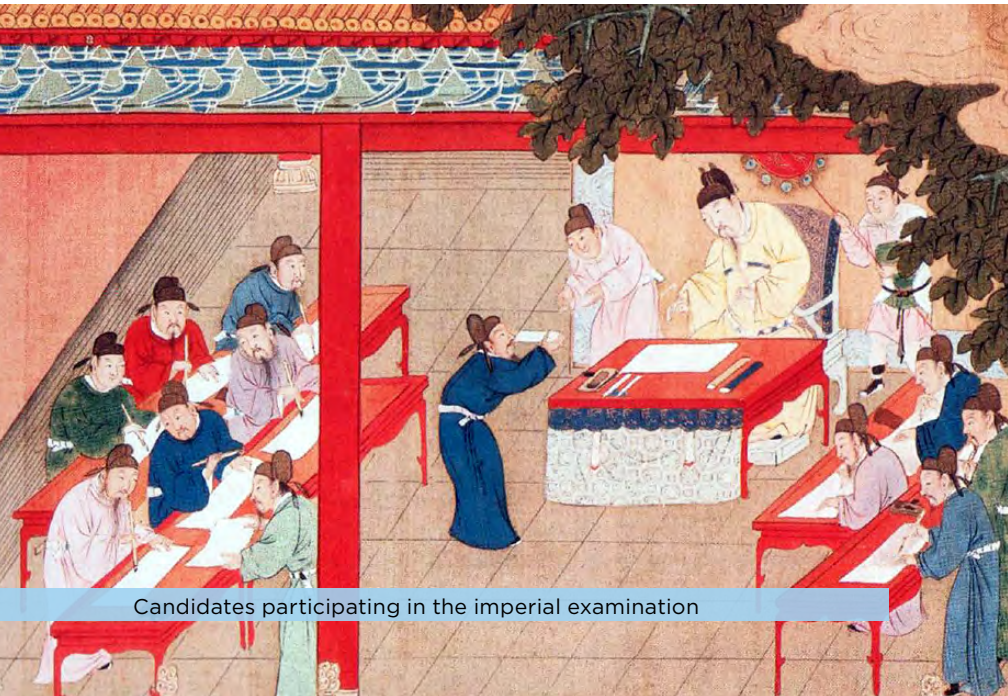
- But these foreign crops, like silver, were a mixed blessing. Farming hills and mountainsides accelerated deforestation and soil erosion. This left China environmentally ravaged and exceptionally vulnerable to hydraulic disasters.

PROSPEROUS DAYS OF THE MING

- During the prosperous days of the late-16th-century Ming dynasty, the educated class of literati, along with the merchants, was flush with American silver. To some, it seemed to be an unprecedented period of good living and sophisticated tastes. But to others, the widespread obsession with pleasure and conspicuous consumption signaled moral collapse.

- Ming authors paid an awful lot of attention to food: its production, sale, and consumption. During the rebellions that ultimately brought down the Ming dynasty, a scholar name Li Tingsheng supported his family by selling melons and peaches. Other literati were also deeply involved in commercial activity.

- At the same time, merchants started to embrace education and affect literati lifestyles. The growing confusion of social roles and status between scholars and merchants has much to do with the proliferation of extended families known as lineages. These families had lineage charters, which established who was and wasn't a member and the rules of a lineage.



Candidates participating in the imperial examination

- Many of the charters were based on the work of the 12th-century neo-Confucian philosopher Zhu Xi. The rules were that lineage members should honor their parents and revere their ancestors. Scholarly young men should devote themselves to study, take the imperial exams, and perhaps become an official. That's the classic literati side of it.

- But these charters also inventoried lineage properties. Lineages invested in real estate, managed ancestral temples, and pooled resources to educate scholarly young men. The less scholarly increasingly manned the lineage's commercial enterprises.

NEW TYPES OF WRITING

- Eating out became more popular and satisfying, but so too did dining in. Hosting a successful dinner party became an emblem of good taste. Thus started a proliferation of cookbooks filled with recipes and commentary on what constituted good taste.

- Equally popular were travel guides. More people were traveling on business, including officials, examination candidates, and merchants. They needed practical advice on where to stay, where to eat, where to shop, and how to get from one place to the next. Huang Bian's *Comprehensive Route Book*, first published in 1570, includes travel distances, food and lodging recommendations, and advice on safety.

- In addition, growing numbers of people started to mix business with pleasure and became interested in sightseeing. For them, Huang included information on sites of historical and religious interest.

- Authors also penned buying guides for furnishing a household with bronze, porcelain, paintings, and elegant rosewood furniture. With consumer demand spiking, there were naturally a lot of fakes on the market. Guidebook authors offered advice on how to spot fakes and avoid forgeries.

THE SEX TRADE

- During this time, prostitution was pervasive. Men and women alike were available as sexual partners for anyone willing to pay. At the top of the price range were the courtesans.

- Beautiful, fashionable, and well educated, these women were frequently objects of intense desire and personal magnetism. They were as celebrated for their conversation skills and ability to host an intellectually stimulating drinking party as they were for their lovemaking.

- Ming courtesans were expected to be skilled in painting, calligraphy, and poetry, making them essentially equals of their wealthy and cultured male clientele. The late Ming period was rife with tales of these remarkable women and the powerful men they rendered powerless.

Chen Yuanyuan, concubine of Wu Sangui

- Another late Ming market—which horrified the late-16th-century Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci—was the high-end market for the sexual services of boys. Pederasty was a badly kept secret among the affluent class.

Excessive luxury and decadence marked the late Ming period.

CULTURAL CONFLICTS

- Prosperity gave many the means to pursue spiritual enrichment. There was a boom in popular Buddhism and Daoism. The proliferation of wealth—and perhaps the moral insecurities of the new moneyed class—underlay new support for temples, monasteries, and other philanthropic pursuits by merchant and gentry alike.

- Temples received gifts of bronze and iron statues and massive bronze bells. At the same time, the demand for copper cash meant these massive bronzes were targets of theft and government confiscation. Countless pieces of religious art were melted down and converted to cash or recast as cannons and small arms.

- Many members of the Ming elite found themselves deeply conflicted about the volatile society they inhabited and by the confusions of pleasure swirling around them. Zhang Tao—the magistrate of She County, in the region south of Nanjing—decried the worship of false gods, like one he called the Lord of Silver, as a sign of the end times.

- Writing in the first decade of the 17th century, Zhang worried that the world had fallen about as far as possible from the ideal of minimal government and minimal trade that he believed had characterized the early Ming. Zhang Tao observed that his generation's "poor were oppressed by the rich" and that "avarice was without limit."

- Of special concern were the efforts of newly rich merchants to insert themselves in the world of the Confucian literati and blur the status distinctions that Zhang believed essential to a well-ordered society.

- Nothing was more emblematic of the Ming dynasty's purported moral decline than pervasive official corruption, especially that of court eunuchs, who were always a favorite target for Confucian moralists.

- For instance, the eunuch Wei Zhongxian had become fabulously wealthy in the 1620s while running the government under the absentee Tianqi emperor. After Wei's fall from power, the goods confiscated from his lavish palaces filled 40 carriages. His cash holdings alone included millions of taels of gold and tens of millions of silver taels.

- Another episode occurred in 1603, when the Ming dispatched a team of mining inspectors to Manila. The conduct of the inspection team was so arrogant that the Spanish concluded the delegation was a scouting party for an invasion. The Spanish began to arm themselves.

- In a series of tragic misunderstandings, the crisis escalated into a massacre of Manila's Chinese residents, in which between 15,000 and 25,000 Chinese were killed.

- The corruption of eunuchs and episodes like the mining-inspector scam have given the late Ming period a very bad reputation in conventional historiography. To many historians, it appears to have been an era of absentee emperors, venal officials, general licentiousness, and moral and military decay.

- But the period also saw a burst of productivity and innovation that animated all aspects of daily life in late Ming China. It was the moment when the Chinese empire became deeply connected to global trade and to the currents of global history.

SUGGESTED READING

Brook, *The Confusions of Pleasure*.
———, *The Troubled Empire*.
Clunas, *Superfluous Things*.
Spence, "Food" in *Chinese Roundabout*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What does Antonio de Morga's account of the Chinese products for sale in Manila reveal about the Chinese economy in the 16th century?

- How did the arrival of large numbers of Europeans in maritime East Asia impact the daily lives of people in Ming China?

- What impact did international trade have on the diet and cuisine of imperial China?

- What does the proliferation of style and lifestyle manuals and travel guides tell us about daily life in late-imperial China?

Lecture 18

THE GREAT WALL AND MILITARY LIFE IN CHINA

China's Great Wall was strategically significant for two brief periods of the nearly 300-year Ming dynasty: during the mid-15th century, when the first watchtowers were built in the Ordos Desert of inner Mongolia, and again in the early 17th century, when the Ming saw the wall as a bulwark against the Manchus. Some have said that the Ming enjoyed nearly 280 years of peace. In reality, those three centuries were punctuated by numerous military conflicts, most of which were won by the Ming.

This lecture focuses on military life during the Ming dynasty. While the Ming army spent a lot of man hours building and manning the Great Wall, it also spent a lot of time on the move, in particular during the two great bursts of Ming military energy: the period from the 1360s to the 1420s and the decades from the 1560s to the 1620s.

14TH-CENTURY MILITARY LIFE

- In the 14th century, a given member of the Ming military very likely had joined up during a violent civil war that ultimately brought down the Mongols' Yuan dynasty in 1368. This war featured an impressive array of military techniques: siege warfare, infantry battles, naval and riverine operations, and the widespread use of firearms and incendiary weapons. The life of a Ming solder involved fighting in many theatres and in many types of battles.

- The rebellion that brought down the Yuan dynasty got off to a rather feeble start. In the 1350s, a small group of followers of the White Lotus sect revolted against Mongol rule. The movement was crushed. But the survivors regrouped and formed the Red Turban Army.

- The Red Turbans started to gain adherents and strategic momentum. They were smart enough to focus their efforts on capturing cities. Urban factories and urban arsenals—along with foodstuffs and manpower—gave the rebels the ability to field large armies onto which they grafted Mongol military organization.

- Red Turban warlords rapidly built themselves proto-states, and this is where the civil war among the Red Turbans really began. The man who prevailed in that civil war, Zhu Yuanzhang, was born a peasant. He lost his entire family to flood and famine, spent time as a Buddhist monk, and was both a beggar and a mercenary.

- In jail and unable to bribe his way out, Zhu contacted a local Red Turban commander and asked to join the rebels. The commander agreed so long as Zhu brought along at least 24 followers. These men were indicative of the soldiers in the Red Turban ranks: a mix of peasants, laborers, former monks, and failed merchants. These were men who would be left idle when the economy of East China collapsed in the 1350s and 1360s.

- Ming infantry consisted of companies of 112 men, divided into platoons of 56 men. They were naturally cohesive units, comprised primarily of neighbors and kinsmen and commanded by officers from the same in–group.

- About 40 percent carried spears and another 40 percent carried long-range weapons such as bows, crossbows, and firearms. The rest carried swords and shields. Aside from his weaponry, a soldier's kit consisted of trousers, leather boots, a silk blouse, and a long tunic. He was also outfitted with a helmet.

- The most common small arm was a five-pound hand cannon that shot an arrow said to pierce armor at 500 yards. Like all early guns, it was an inaccurate volley weapon, fired at distance before the infantry closed with spears and swords.

- The early Ming military was based on strong personal ties. Officers were expected to earn loyalty. They led from the front, looked after their men, and guaranteed them a share of the spoils. When called upon, though, they had to personally execute comrades for cowardice or theft.

The Hongwu Emperor (Zhu Yuanzhang)

BATTLE

- To the untrained eye, a Chinese army in action would be all noise and chaotic motion: banging drums, crashing cymbals, blaring horns, and blasting artillery and muskets. This would obscure the reality that good order and discipline were at the heart of the Ming way of war.

- In battle, the actions of the company were controlled by gongs, drums, pipes, and trumpets, not unlike a Roman legion. And like a legion, standard bearers and musicians were the elite veterans that guaranteed that new recruits stayed in formation. In these areas of leadership and organization, Zhu Yuanzhang proved himself both ruthless and brilliant.

- By the 1350s, Zhu was a powerful warlord commanding large parts of today's Henan and Anhui provinces. But he needed a base of operations. So he set his sights on the ancient capital, Nanjing. To take Nanjing, Zhu's army needed to breach the city walls, for which they built huge siege towers and great catapults. They also needed command of the Yangtze River.

- Control of the river was achieved through a fateful alliance with a group called the Lake Ch'ao fleet—essentially, pirate-entrepreneurs. These new allies crushed the fleets guarding Nanjing. By the spring of 1356, Zhu's amphibious attack had taken this city of half a million people, which was the administrative seat of one of China's most prosperous regions.

MORE MOVES

- Control of Nanjing—along with its wealth and people—made Zhu a major contender in the war among the Red Turbans. Zhu's next great victory was at the Battle of Lake Poyang in the summer of 1363. His fleet demolished that of the rival state of Han. This three-month battle probably involved more than 500,000 men. It featured massive three-deck floating fortresses topped with armor-plated archery towers.

- The victory at Lake Poyang was perhaps the greatest naval battle of the 14th century, and it secured Zhu's command of modern Jiangxi province. From there, he turned downstream to the state of Wu, which he exterminated, taking their capital at Suzhou.

- Zhu then sent his fleets south to take the provinces of Guangdong and Fujian. He sent his armies north to drive the Mongols from Beijing. With the Mongols in retreat, Zhu Yuanzhang was declared emperor of the new Ming dynasty. His imperial title was Hongwu.

- The emperor wasn't interested in stopping. He sent armies into Sichuan and Yunnan and deep into Mongolia, where they seized the city of Shangdu, aka Xanadu. Only when the push into northern Mongolia was repulsed did Hongwu shift from conquest to consolidation.

- Hongwu had to do something with the millions of men in his service when they weren't on campaign. His solution was both intriguing and problematic. He made military service and rank hereditary.

- If your father had been a sergeant in the emperor's cavalry, each generation of your family was now obligated to supply an able-bodied man for cavalry service from age 16 to 60. Hongwu also created permanent military reservations.

FIGHTING THE MONGOLS

- A later ruler, Yongle—who reigned from 1402 to 1424—went on to invade northern Vietnam and sent a huge armada into the Indian Ocean. But it was the Mongols who dominated his attention. He led five ambitious campaigns against the Mongols.

- In the north, the security of the new empire depended on how far the Mongols could be driven back. Mongol coalitions were highly volatile. If the Ming could exploit tribal divisions, they might make the southern Mongol tribes subjects of—and a strategic buffer for—the new Ming state.

- But to accomplish that, Yongle needed to go on the offensive. The emperor's third Mongolian campaign advanced several hundred miles into the steppe with more than 200,000 men, 100,000 wagons, and 300,000 pack animals.

- Yongle won battles in Mongolia. But he could never decisively resolve the strategic dilemma: finding a sustainable balance between the settled lands of the Ming empire and the mobile world of the steppe. He died during his fifth campaign against the Mongols, bequeathing the problem to his successors.

- A final offensive against the Mongols a generation later was a complete disaster. In 1449, near the remote post of Tumu, a Ming army of a 500,000 men was annihilated by Mongol cavalry. The emperor himself was captured.

General Qi Jiguang

- After Tumu, the Ming opted for a defensive stance on the northwest frontier. They began to build a series of forts and signal towers that were the rudimentary foundations of what we know today as the Great Wall.

- By the 16th century, only a fraction of military households was still on the reservations, many having fled or found ingenious ways to dodge service. The old system was defunct.

REFORMS

- At sea, piracy became a problem for the Ming, in part because of maritime prohibitions. But by the 1560s, the Ming deployed large numbers of naval vessels—almost all armed with cannons—and pursued pirates far out to sea. The Ming also lifted the maritime prohibitions. The Ming won their war on piracy, but remained vigilant at sea.

- Back on land, general Qi Jiguang was reforming segments of the Ming army. General Qi was obsessed with drill and discipline. He wrote military manuals that are dense with drill techniques and diagrams of military formations. And he rearranged the old 112-man companies into far more flexible 12-man squads.

- As Qi Jiguang was working to revamp the Ming army, a new generation of firearms was making its way into China. Chinese black powder—a simple mixture of saltpeter, sulfur, and charcoal—had been known since the 9th century and was widely used by the 12th century in incendiary weapons like flamethrowers and rockets.

- In the 13th century, China's ruling dynasty held off a Mongol onslaught for two generations, in large measure because it had cutting-edge gunpowder weapons.

- Qi's idea for dealing with the chronic Mongol threat was to pair his well-drilled infantry with artillery carriages that could be used as a mobile defensive screen. It was an innovative concept. But the Ming dynasty soon decided to rescind its trading ban with the Mongols. With the reopening of regular border markets, the Mongol impetus to raid disappeared.

- Qi kept his men busy building the walls and watchtowers that millions of tourists now flock to north of Beijing. He died in 1587, a seeming failure. But his military reforms—and the new gunpowder weapons the Ming began to mass-produce—soon proved their worth.

THE IMJIN WAR

- In the 1590s, the Ming dynasty faced a conflict that played to its emerging strengths. This was the Imjin War—a titanic struggle between the Ming and its Korean ally against the Japanese warlord, Hideyoshi, who wanted to use Korea as a springboard to invade China.

- Hideyoshi's ambitious strategy failed because Chinese and Korean armies were drilled and disciplined, well supplied, and supported by two very capable navies. The Chinese soldiers who marched to the defense of Korea were armed with muskets. Other soldiers had the *folanqi*, or Frankish breech-loading swivel gun.

- The cavalry—many of them Mongol and Manchu—were armed with their trusty and powerful bows. Others were equipped with triple-barrelled carbine designed for close-in fighting. There were also units of miners and engineers to dig trenches, build siege works, and undermine the walls of Japanese-held cities in Korea. The Ming brought cannons as well.

- The Ming navy was formidable too. After the Chinese and Korean ground forces blunted the final Japanese offensive in Korea, the Japanese fleet was obliterated while trying to evacuate Hideyoshi's army. This was the Battle of Noryang in December 1598. The victors were a Sino-Korean armada consisting of hundreds of ships, bristling with thousands of cannon.

DECLINE

- The Ming combined superior leadership, organizational skill, and technological innovation. But their decades of war had been expensive; they raised the pressure on the dynasty to find extraordinary sources of revenue to pay its war debts.

- Only long-term reforms, like diversifying the tax-base, would allow the Ming to keep its military edge. But the neo-Confucians who dominated the civil bureaucracy did everything they could to stymie reforms because those reforms would have extended the reach of the state into the commercial economy.

- The Ming military edge lasted another generation. But in the 1640s, the dynasty was so crippled by factional politics and anachronistic institutions that it couldn't put down domestic rebellions or contain the growing power of the Manchu people. In the summer of 1644, the Ming emperor hung himself as rebels stormed Beijing. The Manchus crossed the Great Wall soon after.

SUGGESTED READING

Graff and Higham, eds., *A Military History of China*.
Swope, *A Dragon's Head and a Serpent's Tail*.
Waldron, *The Great Wall of China*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What are the most common misconceptions about attitudes toward the military and about the strategic culture of imperial China?
- How have the myths about the Great Wall influenced your assumptions about Chinese military history?
- Why did the Ming dynasty build the Great Wall? What does its construction say about the foreign policy and strategic outlook of the Ming?
- Why did Zhu Yuanzhang need a navy? Why did the Ming Dynasty need a navy in the 16th century?

QING DYNASTY: SOUL STEALERS AND SEDITION

Halfway through the reign of the most powerful emperor in China's most powerful dynasty, the empire was rocked by a sorcery scare. Rumors and accusations were rife that masons, monks, and others were stealing human souls. The purported soul-stealing method was this: The evildoers were clipping off men's ponytails and absconding with their life essence. County magistrates and prefects rounded up the suspects and subjected them to brutal interrogations. These confessions were reported up the chain of command to provincial governors and relayed in breathless detail to the emperor himself. The year was 1768, and China was ruled by the Qing dynasty under the Qianlong Emperor.

The sorcery scare allows us to explore several facets of life during this era. First, it gives a look at the men accused of soul stealing, who tended to live outside mainstream society. Second, it allows us to glimpse the practices and purposes of criminal justice in imperial China. Third, public fears about sorcery—and the emperor's corresponding concerns about sedition—converged in the hysteria, revealing something about the values and fears of both the rulers and the ruled.

THE STEALING OF SOULS

- Traditional belief held that the soul consisted of two components. One was the *hun*, or "cloud soul." This was higher consciousness, which could leave the body. The other component was the *po*, or "white soul," which remained tethered to the body. In a healthy person, these should be in balance.

- However, the *hun* was volatile. It might take flight while you were dreaming, returning as you woke up. A serious disease or particularly scary experience might cause the *hun* to flee. If it couldn't be coaxed back, you'd gradually sicken and die. Soul stealers were after the *hun*.

- People believed it was relatively easy to detach the hun from the body. All a sorcerer needed to do was to write a person's name on a magic-infused strip of paper—or steal a piece of the victim's clothing. Even better were skin, blood, fingernails, a tooth, or a lock of hair.

- The first soul-stealing suspect was a stone mason named Wu Tongming. He had been contracted to repair a dam at the county seat of Deqing, in the coastal province of Zhejiang.

Interrogation of Chinese prisoner by torturers

- Rumor had it that Wu's men were collecting the names of locals and writing them on slips of paper. Those slips were attached to the pilings the men were driving to repair the dam. Fortunately, Wu's bona fides checked out and the accusations didn't stick. Far more sinister suspects were to be found among China's rootless beggars and wandering monks.

THE UNDERCLASS

- A combination of explosive population growth, land shortages, and economic change created a large underclass in 18th-century China. It consisted primarily of men, many of whom who had cut ties with their communities. Reasons for their alienation ran from family tragedy to substance abuse to criminal behavior.

- Some were simply looking for work; others for spiritual enlightenment. For instance, the monks Chu-ch'eng and Ching-hsin had both lost parents and wives, and joined the Buddhist clergy late in life. They were begging in the suburbs of the city of Hangzhou when an angry mob descended upon them.

- Apparently, Chu-ch'eng had struck up a conversation with a local youth and asked him what his name was. His terrified parents thought the monk was out to steal the boy's soul.

- China's rulers were suspicious of monks. Monks produced neither food nor children. They didn't pay taxes and didn't stay put. And since most monks weren't registered, the state couldn't be sure what they were.

- There was another reason for Qing officials to be wary. When you became a monk, you were expected to keep your face and head clean-shaven. Cutting off your hair was a symbol of your separation from lay society. But the Qing was a foreign dynasty. Its founders were Manchus from northeast Asia.

- Soon after the Manchus conquered China in 1644, all Chinese men were ordered to wear their hair in a queue: shaved on the top and sides, with a long ponytail at the back. The queue symbolized submission to Manchu rule.

- Legitimate monks were the only exception. Cutting off your queue—or growing hair on the top and sides—might be an act of rebellion. The historian Philip Kuhn concluded that Qing officials viewed the "thousands of vagrant monks" that prowled the empire as a "breeding ground for sedition and lawlessness." Unregistered and unkempt monks weren't just a local problem; they might be agents of anti-Qing rebellion.

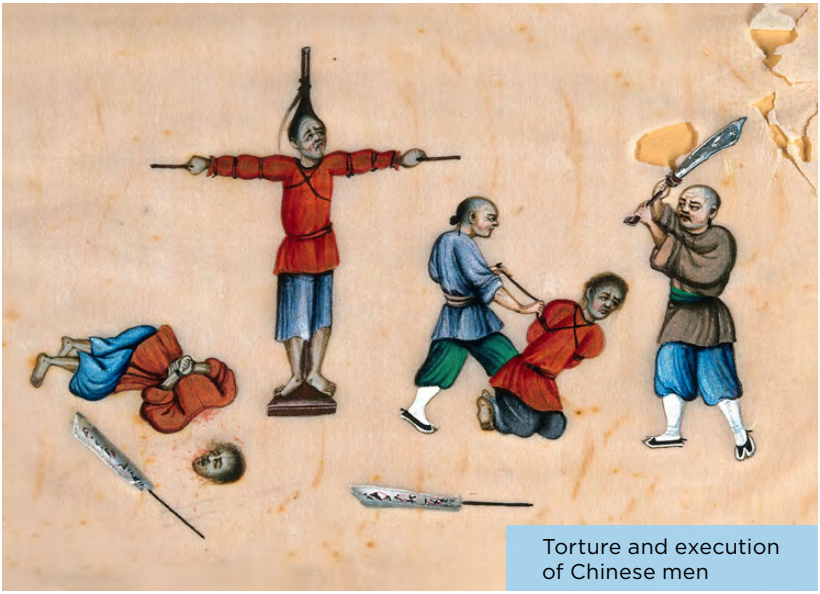
THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

- Crime in China was viewed as tipping the cosmic order out of balance; punishment was meant to bring the order back into balance. Chinese law outlined five punishments, or *wuxing*, calibrated to fit crime. They were:

  - Beating with a light stick.
  - Beating with a heavy stick.
  - Incarceration.
  - Exile.
  - Death.

- Under each were finer iterations ranging from 10 to 100 blows. Or, a criminal might be sentenced to death by strangulation (less punitive) or decapitation (more punitive). The most severe punishment was *lingchi*, in which the accused was slowly dismembered.

- The linchpin of the Qing justice system was the county magistrate, who oversaw a local population of as many as a million people. Demands placed on the magistrate were immense.



Torture and execution of Chinese men

- Criminal cases that did not carry the death penalty were mostly adjudicated at the county level. But the soul-stealer cases were pushed all the way to the top, where the empire's most senior officials could be found interrogating accused soul stealers.

- It's doubtful many of the magistrates believed souls were being stolen. They probably thought of it as a minor disturbance, spun up by troublesome vagrants. The emperor, too, was skeptical of soul-stealing. But he considered the hysteria anything but minor. He believed it constituted a threat to the very foundations of imperial rule. His anxieties reverberated back down the chain of command.

- The Qing legal system considered confessions absolutely essential to the timely resolution of criminal cases. But from the magistrates' point of view, no sane suspect would willingly confess, especially with a crime as heinous as soul stealing. And since spontaneous confessions were unlikely, torture became a prominent component of Chinese justice.

THE EMPIRE'S OPERATIONS

- The soul-stealer phenomenon gives an exceptionally clear view into the daily operations of the empire. The emperor, Qianlong, was a serious and dedicated administrator. He reviewed hundreds of official correspondences each day.

The Qianlong Emperor

- At times, Qianlong would even play the role of imperial wordsmith, correcting the grammar and syntax of his governors and governors-general. This was especially the case with Manchu officials. Qianlong wanted them to maintain their native tongue and cultural distinctiveness. It helped that Qianlong was fluent in each of the Qing's five official languages: Manchu, Mandarin, Mongol, Uighur, and Tibetan.

- Qianlong's primary task was to ensure the cosmic order by making sure the empire's subjects were well behaved and dutiful. But when the social order broke down, punishment was necessary.

- Among the emperor's most sacred duties was his annual review of all cases calling for the death penalty. Such crimes most threatened the cosmic order. Qianlong felt a deep sense of responsibility for the justice carried out in his name.

- The annual judicial review, or Autumn Assizes, rounded out the administrative year, and was a great ceremony that sanctified Qianlong's role as supreme jurist. The Assizes were also an opportunity to demonstrate benevolence and magnanimity by commuting death sentences. Qianlong thought of himself as a particularly magnanimous and conscientious ruler. The Assizes also posed an opportunity for the emperor to make sure that all levels of imperial officials were doing their duty.

- Qianlong possessed an intimate familiarity with his senior bureaucrats, which bred in him a certain amount of contempt and suspicion. He was particularly sensitive to the danger that this invaluable cadre had gone soft and careerist. Even more worrisome was the specter that the provinces clustered around the lower reaches of the Yangtze River had an insidious influence on the emperor's most trusted agents.

- This was the region known as Jiangnan—where the soul-stealing scare began. Qing emperors, especially Qianlong, had a love-hate relationship with the Jiangnan region. It was a rich, fertile, and culturally sophisticated region that had been the seat of some of the most active and bloody resistance to the Qing conquest in the 17th century.

- At the same time, Jiangnan supplied Beijing and the Qing's northern garrisons with food. The region also supplied the empire with a disproportionate number of the bright young men who won positions in the government by dint of their success in the civil service exams.

- Qianlong doesn't appear to have been particularly concerned about sorcery or soul stealing in particular, though he was interested in the bizarre details. Qianlong was more concerned that queue-less wanderers were clipping queues. Worse yet, some frightened locals were cutting off their own queues to prevent sorcerers from stealing their souls.

- And the emperor was concerned that his provincial agents were not taking the situation seriously enough. Service in Jiangnan was making them lax and decadent, just when he needed his officials the most.

- The soul-stealing prosecutions eventually unraveled. No evidence of a vast conspiracy was ever found. No ringleaders were apprehended. And most of the suspects who survived incarceration and torture recanted their admissions of guilt.

Interrogation of Chinese prisoner

- When subjected to torture, the monk Chu-ch'eng confessed to clipping queues and attempting to steal souls. He and his companions were tortured again at the prefectural level.

- But the provincial judge concluded the monks were victims of extortion by the county constable who had arrested them. The crippled monks were released and granted a small stipend to see them through until their bones mended.

SUGGESTED READING

Brook, Bourgon, and Blue, *Death by a Thousand Cuts*.
Hegel, trans., *True Crimes in Eighteenth-Century China*.
Hung, *Protest with Chinese Characteristics*.
Kuhn, *Soulstealers*.
Rowe, *China's Last Empire*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What cultural, social, and economic factors explain the soul-stealing panic?

- Why did the Qing emperor review all capital cases? Why would the emperor be particularly interested in cases of queue clipping and soul stealing?

- How does the criminal justice system in late-imperial China compare to other traditional societies that you have studied? What was the role of torture in the criminal justice system?

- What would it have been like to be a soul-stealing suspect?

Lecture 20

EMPEROR QIANLONG HOSTS A BRITISH AMBASSADOR

The Qing dynasty was the last to rule imperial China. Qing emperors were Manchus, a semi-nomadic people from northeast Asia who poured into China in 1644. Qing warriors picked up the pieces left by the fall of the Ming dynasty and created a vast multi-ethnic empire that included China, Tibet, Taiwan, Manchuria, Mongolia, and large stretches of Central Asia. The dynasty reached its peaked in the late 18th century under Emperor Qianlong. This lecture follows Qianlong as he performs one of his most important duties: being the consummate host to foreign emissaries and demonstrating the magnanimity expected of the most powerful man on earth. Specifically, this lecture looks at a banquet held for the British ambassador George Macartney.

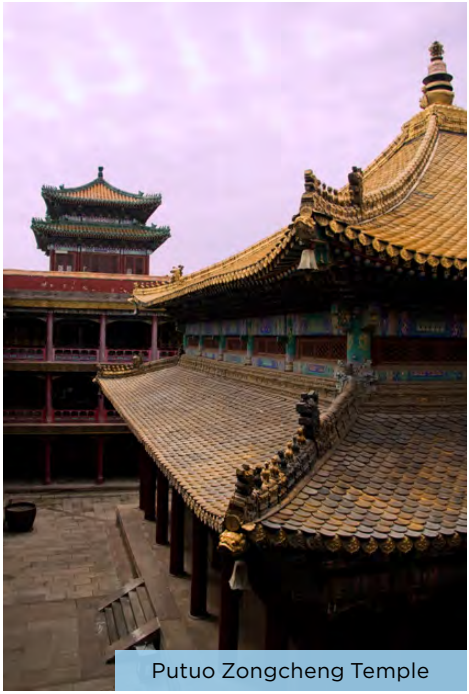
Macartney meets Qianlong

THE IMPERIAL RETREAT

- The banquet for Macartney occurred in the summer of 1793. The heat in Beijing, the imperial capital, was stifling. But the summer retreat at Chengde was about 150 miles to the northeast and 1,000 feet above sea level; the air there was much cleaner and cooler. Qianlong turned 82 the summer of the Macartney banquet and had been on the throne for 58 years.

- Qianlong went out of his way to make Chengde a welcoming destination. Among the mountain retreat's 72 scenic spots are gardens and architecture based on famous sites elsewhere in China.

- The most spectacular site at Chengde lies outside the imperial resort. It's the Putuo Zongcheng Temple, which is a 2.4-million-square-foot replica of the Potala Palace in Lhasa in modern-day Tibet. The Potala Palace was the winter residence of the Dalai Lama from the 17th century to the 20th.



Putuo Zongcheng Temple

- Chengde was built to suit the emperor's taste, and to serenely—but firmly—advertise Qianlong's position at the apex of the world's rulers. The gravitational pull of Qing power spread to other Asian states—notably Korea, Vietnam, and the Ryukyu Islands. They, too, made periodic pilgrimages to Beijing and sometimes to Chengde to pay tribute to their Manchu overlord.

THE IMPERIAL KITCHENS

- The imperial kitchens at the retreat had multiple sources of supply. First were the huge imperial farms spread across North China and Manchuria that supplied much of the grain and other staples.

- There were imperial fisheries, ranches, and breweries. The breweries produced such beverages as beer, wine, and koumiss, made from fermented mare's milk. They also made vinegar and other fermented condiments.

- Next were the foods owed to the court and collected from various parts of the empire as tribute to Qianlong. What imperial estates and regional tribute couldn't provide had to be purchased. One year's purchases include 750,000 bushels of cereals, 400,000 eggs, and 1,000 barrels of wine.

- Separate kitchens and staffs fed the emperor's personal bondservants, his children, and most of the imperial consorts. Above that were kitchens for first-rank consorts and, above that, separate kitchens for the empress and empress dowager—the emperor's mother. Finally, the best kitchens, best ingredients, and teams of the best chefs were reserved exclusively for the emperor.

Song-era party

- A supper menu near the midpoint of his reign featured clear soup, chicken and duck with tofu, fried chicken, swallow's nests with smoked duck, and a dish of salted duck and pork complemented by an assortment of pickles—and plenty of boiled rice. For sweets, there were steamed dumplings and rice cakes.

THE GUEST

- The guest at this lecture's banquet, George Macartney, formerly had been governor of Madras in India and was no stranger to the powerful. He negotiated the 1764 alliance between Catherine the Great and King George III.

George Macartney

- He had an ambitious agenda in China. His first goal was to end the Canton System, by which the imperial household controlled the entry of foreign commerce into China. The British bridled at the restrictions of the Canton System and at the painful fact that the Chinese didn't seem to be interested in buying more of their wares, forcing the British to purchase Chinese goods with silver.

- While South China wasn't a particularly good market for British woolen wares, the British Empire was a huge market for tea. At the time of Macartney's visit to China, silver bullion accounts for between 80 and 90 percent of the value of foreign cargoes landing at Canton.

- The British wanted to open more ports and gain more access to the larger Chinese market to correct the huge trade imbalance. Macartney's aim was to accomplish that. Another of Macartney's objectives was to initiate full and equal diplomatic relations between the British Empire and the Qing dynasty.

- However, Qianlong chose to view Macartney's mission as a form of tribute offered by the king of a distant land. Being treated as a tributary was actually an upgrade from the low status Britain was accorded under the Canton System. Above all, Qianlong wanted to impress on the British his awesome might and magnanimity. Macartney faced an uphill battle to have Qianlong accept the idea that George III was on the same level.

THE DELEGATION

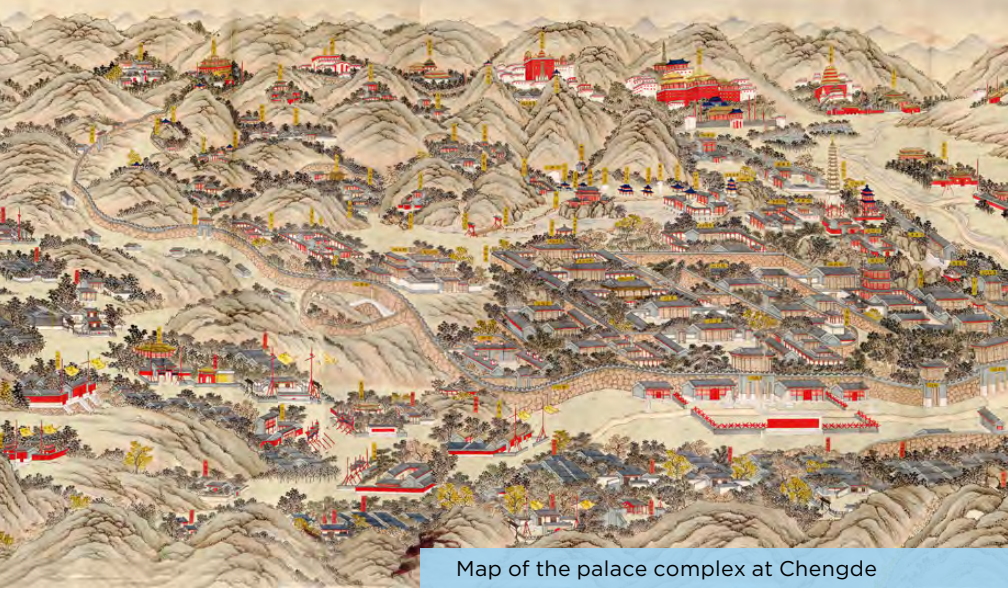
- The British delegation had arrived at the port of Dagu—at the mouth of the Bohai Gulf—in late July 1793. Informed that the emperor was summering north of the Great Wall, the British mission sailed on to modern Tianjin. Qianlong's people decorated the ships with banners stating that there were English ambassadors aboard bearing tribute.

- From there, Macartney and his entourage traveled overland, first to Beijing, and then up to Chengde. It was on this leg of the journey that a bit of trouble started. The Qing interlocutors accompanying Macartney requested that when he met the emperor, he perform the ritual kowtow. This involved the supplicant kneeling three times. Each time he knelt, he was to knock his head on the ground three times.

- Macartney said he would kowtow to Qianlong if a Qing official of a rank equal to his kowtowed to the portrait of George III that Macartney had brought with him. The Qing officials ignored the counterproposal and insisted on an unconditional kowtow.

The emperor goes to his tent before receiving the British ambassador

- Macartney would later claim that he bent only his knee and bowed deeply in the British style. But Qing sources record that he performed the full three kneels and nine knocks. Whatever took place, Qianlong was not impressed enough by the embassy, or its gifts, to consider Macartney's two proposals: open trade and full diplomatic status for Britain.



Map of the palace complex at Chengde

IMPERIAL BANQUETS

- The banquet Macartney attended at the emperor's mountain resort provides an understanding of the ways in which Qianlong was conditioned to see the world and of how the British embassy was slotted into that view. Imperial banquets were all about ritual prescription and elaborate reinforcements of hierarchy and racial distinctions.

- An imperial banquet presented three different menus. The first was what the emperor was served; it had more dishes and was prepared exclusively for him by his personal culinary retinue. The other two menus were broken down into Manchu and Chinese versions.

- The Manchu menu had six grades, depending on seniority. The Chinese menu had five different levels of dishes. The numbers of chefs, the types of cooking implements, and the amount of wood and charcoal dedicated to each level of service was equally stratified.

- Seating arrangements reinforced this hierarchy. An imperial banquet quite literally revolved around the emperor, and Qianlong was keenly attuned to how these occasions reflected his central location within the cosmos.

- We can get a sense of Qianlong's take on banqueting from the numerous poems he composed to commemorate these events. Of the Macartney visit, Qianlong is said to have penned this verse:

  Formerly Portugal presented tribute;
  Now England is paying homage.
  They have out-traveled Shu-hai and Heng-chang;
  My Ancestor's merit and virtue must have reached their distant shores.
  Though their tribute is commonplace, my heart approves sincerely.
  Though what they bring is meagre, yet,
  In my kindness to men from afar I make generous return,
  Wanting to preserve my good health and power.

- The banquet Macartney attended was held in an immense round tent that measured 25 yards in diameter located in a park. The emperor sat alone in an armchair at a high table, on a raised platform facing south. His guests were arranged in concentric arcs of declining seniority.

- The first phalanx of guest spots comprised seven rows of tables with seating for the 49 most senior guests. Beyond that, and spilling out of the tent, are as many as 200 additional tables.

- Imperial banquets ran four hours, and for each stage, elaborate rituals governed the presentation, from the tea and wine courses to the food. The emperor was served first, and all in attendance looked on as Qianlong received tea, then wine, then the main courses. Once the emperor sampled each offering, the guests followed in turn.

- Ironically, for all the richness of imperial cuisine and the elaborate preparations, the food was likely to be awful. Many of the dishes were prepared days in advance and set out on the banquet tables the night before. It must have been something of an ordeal for host and guests alike.

- But there'd be some pleasing distractions: wrestlers, acrobats, and short dramatic performances. And the wine was very good, although overindulgence was a bad idea.

- There was a strategic dimension to these banquets. Qianlong's predecessor, Kangxi, felt that conferring titles and hosting banquets for Mongols, Manchus, and Tibetans—as well as for tribute bearers from Korea, Vietnam, and the Ryukyu Islands—provided the Qing with an impregnable security buffer. Qianlong shared such notions.

- A signal honor bestowed on a banquet guest was being invited to the emperor's table to receive a cup of wine. Qianlong sent Macartney and his aides multiple dishes from his table. The emperor also invited Macartney and an English diplomat who had accompanied him—Sir George Staunton—to come forward. To each, he handed a bowl of warm wine. Macartney found the sweet rice wine very pleasant on an unseasonably chilly day.

- Once the banquet was complete, the guests performed one final kowtow as the emperor withdrew, leaving all to bask in his imperial glow.

THE RESULT

- For all the drama and wrangling that summer, the Macartney mission failed to deliver a diplomatic breakthrough. And while Lord Macartney was clearly impressed by the pomp and spectacle of the Qing's hospitality, he was not impressed with the health of the Qing empire.

- He likened it to an old ship of the line past its prime. Under the command of vigilant officers, it still managed to impress its neighbors with its size. "But with lesser men at the helm," he said, it would likely "run aground." This was a stark and prescient prediction of the war, rebellion, flood, famine, and political collapse that consumed the Qing empire in the decades that followed.

- Some historians see Qianlong's rebuff of Macartney as a signal event in the decline of imperial China. It's a powerful narrative, but there's a more sympathetic way to look at Qianlong's actions. Qianlong might

have underestimated the importance of global maritime trade, but he was no fool. Britain was peripheral to his geo-strategic concerns, and Macartney's diplomatic objectives were unreasonable and unrealistic.

- Qianlong did denigrate Macartney's gifts of clocks and dueling pistols, but he fully appreciated high-tech Western artillery and was acquiring it for his armies. Furthermore, the emperor was probably wise not to get entangled in European politics.

Qianlong Emperor

- A generation later, after Europe emerged from the crucible of the Napoleonic Wars, its great powers would be far more capable of imposing their will on an imperial system then in decline. But that wasn't obvious in the summer of 1793.

SUGGESTED READING

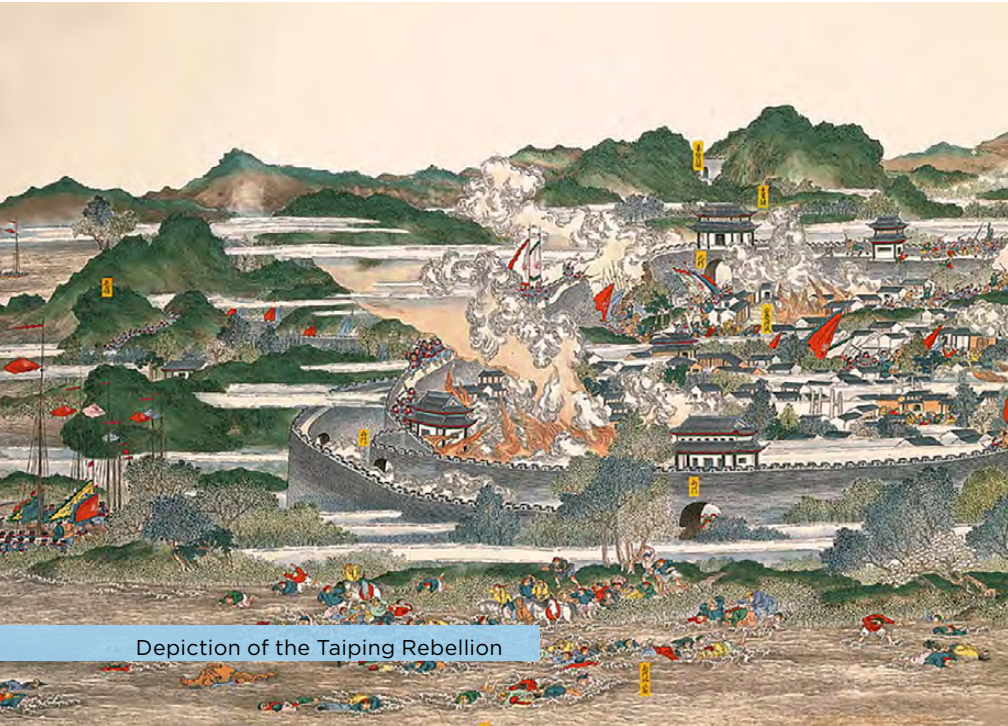
Elliott, *The Emperor Qianlong*.
Hevia, *Cherishing Men from Afar*.
Kangxi, *Thirty-Six Views*.
Rowe, *China's Last Empire*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- How did the imperial resort complex at Chengde reflect Qing ideas of sovereignty?
- Why would the Qing lavish so much money and energy on feeding the emperor and his clan?
- What would it have been like to prepare the meals for an imperial banquet? What would it have been like to attend an imperial banquet?
- How did imperial banquets reflect Qing ideas about the nature of empire and the position of the emperor?
- Why do you think that Qianlong took such an interest in the mechanics of his meetings with Macartney?

THE TAIPING REBELLION AND ITS CULT LEADER

This lecture's subject, the Taiping Rebellion, was the bloodiest civil war in history. Between 1850 and 1864, more than 600 Chinese cities were destroyed. The death toll was at least 20 million people, rising to 100 million factoring in the floods and famines caused by fighting. The charismatic and visionary leader Hong Xiuquan led the Taiping rebels. He had declared himself king of the Taiping Tianguo, or Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace. Hong and many of his followers were a cultural and linguistic minority known as the Hakka. A mix of religious fanaticism and a sense of social victimization fired their revolutionary zeal.



Depiction of the Taiping Rebellion

THE HAKKA

- The minority Hakka shared the same ethnicity as the majority Han Chinese, but there many things set them apart. They had a unique dialect and distinct cultural practices.

- Over the course of centuries, the Hakka had migrated from the Yellow River region to South China. And they were historically pitted against the Han natives, or bendi, wherever the Hakka settled. Bendi occupied the fertile valley floors. Hakka settled in the hills and mountains.

- The wandering ways of the Hakka engendered suspicions among their neighbors. The Hakka were also distinguished by their occupations: migratory jobs like mining, forestry, and tea portage. Hakka women were equally mobile and stood out from Han women because they did not bind their feet.

- By the time of the Taiping Rebellion, the Hakka had been in South China for generations, but were still considered outsiders, as evidenced by their fortress-like communal houses. Yet the economy was good to the Hakka in the first decades of the 19th century.

- While the Hakka differed from the Han in many ways, both groups worshipped numerous gods and revered historical icons like Confucius and Laozi. Local luminaries—military heroes and scholars—also entered the pantheon. Monotheism was an alien concept.

- The Hakka had bought into the imperial examination system and educated their sons to compete for positions in the Qing bureaucracy. In some Hakka communities, male literacy rates were as high as 80 percent.

HONG XIUQUAN

- Hong Xiuquan was born in 1814. An excellent student, he placed first in the county-level exam in 1836. That made him eligible for the prefectural exams at Canton. He failed the exams twice, though. The first time, he left Canton with a Christian pamphlet handed to him by a foreigner. It was titled "Good Words for Exhorting the Age."

Hong Xiuquan

- After his second failure, in 1837, he lapsed into a feverish coma and was carried home by sedan chair. He spouted gibberish and flailed about; his family locked him up for fear that he'd lost his mind.

- In that feverish state, Hong had an elaborate dream. In it, he readied himself for a journey to hell. But instead, he was spirited to the gates of heaven, where a woman calling herself Hong's mother bathed him and presented him to his father.

- This heavenly father—tall and with a full golden beard—berated Hong for failing to arouse his neighbors on earth to fight the demons who had ensnared and enslaved them. The father gave Hong a sword and golden seal. With the help of his elder brother—also tall and bearded—Hong vanquished an army of demons who'd invaded heaven. Hong then said farewell to his heavenly family, and his spirit returned to his body.

- Back on earth, the young scholar recovered from his fever. And little seemed to have changed. Hong taught at the village school and gave the civil service exams another try, failing yet again.

WAR

- In 1838–1839, the Qing dynasty tried to quash the opium trade. The British responded with force, and fighting spilled over into the countryside. Once British gunships annihilated the Qing fleet off Shanghai—and steamed up the Yangtze to threaten Nanjing—the court was forced to seek terms. The Opium War wrecked the economy around Canton.

- Thousands of porters who once carried Fujian tea overland were now out of work. To make matters worse, Hong Kong's new British government started flushing pirates from their island bases in the South China Sea. Those pirates relocated to the rivers of Guangdong and Guangxi provinces. Economic inflation was a problem as well. South China was in chaos.

AN AWAKENING

- Meanwhile, at a relative's urging, Hong Xiuquan started reading the Christian pamphlet he'd received years earlier. He noticed that his surname appeared in a chapter title. *Hong* literally means "flood" or "deluge." Learning about Noah and the great flood, Hong was hooked.

- As Hong got deeper into that Christian pamphlet, he concluded that the older man from the bizarre dream he'd had was Jehovah and the younger man was Jesus Christ. In the dream, those had been his father and brother, respectively. Hong decided he was the younger brother of Christ, sent back to earth to do battle with idol worshipers and with the demons who had enslaved the Chinese people.

- Hong spent the next years traveling, studying, and preaching. And when he and his fellow converts were in the mood, they destroyed local symbols of traditional idolatry by defacing icons and vandalizing temples.

- The movement caught on quickly among the Hakka people in rural Guangdong and Guangxi. Among Hong's early converts were two men named Yang Xiuqing and Xiao Chaogui. They claimed that Jehovah and Jesus Christ, respectively, spoke through them.

- Poor and marginalized Hakka like Yang and Xiao shared a siege mentality. They also shared the sense that the Hakka were a chosen people, the true inheritors of ancient Chinese tradition.

HONG MAKES MOVES

- In 1847, Hong returned to Canton to learn more about the bible from American missionary Isaachar Roberts. Roberts hoped to baptize Hong. But for reasons unknown, there was no baptism.

- Instead, Hong returned to his followers in the mountains of Guangxi, armed now with scriptural ammunition from his bible studies in Canton. Hong then experienced two further revelations.

- First, it dawned on him that the civil service exams he'd repeatedly failed were a scam that consumed the time and energies of China's brightest young men. Hong's second revelation was that if the exams were a scam, then the whole edifice of Chinese culture was a lie.

- Hong used his intimate knowledge of Confucianism—his immersion in Chinese culture—to condemn almost all of it as a cultural apparatus of idol worship and impiety that was so pervasive that it must be the work of the devil.

- As his campaign of militant iconoclasm spread, Hong's followers took up arms and started to spout anti-Qing slogans. Things came to a head in 1850 when the violent squabbles finally attracted imperial attention. It had taken the Qing dynasty so long to respond because the movement was taking place at the edge of the empire, thus exploiting the dynasty's peripheral blindness.

- In 1850, Hong decided the earthly demons he was destined to fight were the Manchus and their Chinese collaborators. Another factor: Back in 1644, the Qing dynasty had required that all Chinese men wear their hair in a queue (shaved on top with a long pony tail behind as a sign of submission). Hong's followers stopped shaving their foreheads and cut off their queues. It was an act of open rebellion.

- At this point, Hong had around 20,000 to 30,000 committed followers, many of them Hakka and most of them young. Hong organized them into an army. Soldiers were split up into groups of five: four privates and one corporal.

- Groups of five squads were commanded by a sergeant, and groups of four sergeants were commanded by a lieutenant. A division, up to a strength of 13,000 men, was commanded by a general. The Taiping were militarily effective thanks to the simplicity and discipline of their organization and to their religious zeal.

Depiction of armed forces during the Taiping Rebellion

- The right kinds of people joined the Taiping army: miners (useful for breaching walls), loggers (expert at felling trees for siege engines), and porters (skilled in logistics), for example. There were also able administrators, bandits, pirates, and idle militiamen who joined up.

FIGHTING

- When imperial forces tried to oust the Taiping from their base in Guangxi province, the attack was repulsed, and Hong Xiuquan went on the offensive. The imperial army and local militias were no match for the rebels. Cities fell rapidly.

- In 1853, the rebels captured the former Ming dynasty capital of Nanjing. From 1853 to 1864, Nanjing was the seat of power of Hong's so-called Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace.

- Hong Xiuquan claimed to be creating a Christian paradise on earth. Students were tested on the Bible and on the writings of Hong himself. Military order was now imposed on the civilian population. Groups of 25 families were under the command of a sergeant, who acted as village headman and parish priest.

- The Ten Commandments were to be strictly observed. Licentious behavior—like drunkenness, opium smoking, and prostitution—were outlawed. The Taiping also instituted a radical land reform of redistribution and collectivization. All surplus produce went to the government.

- Equally radical was the Taiping policy toward women. Hakka women were accustomed to farming, logging, mining, and defending their communities. Many of them rallied to the Taiping. As the movement gained ground, Han women were allowed to unbind their feet. They were recruited into the military, sat for exams, and staffed the bureaucracy.

Depiction of Taiping Rebellion fighting

LATER IN THE MOVEMENT

- Taiping momentum evaporated in the late 1850s, as senior leaders fell out among themselves. Yang Xiuqing, the young Hakka who claimed that Jehovah spoke through him, made a grab for the throne.

- Hong had Yang and 20,000 of his followers executed. But as internecine struggles raged, Hong gradually retreated into his palace to enjoy his concubines and indulge his religious visions and paranoid fantasies.

- In 1860, though, a cousin named Hong Rengan injected new energy into the Taiping. His forces smashed an imperial army then besieged Nanjing and captured the canal city of Suzhou, west of Shanghai. The Taiping had their momentum back.

- Once back in Nanjing, Hong Rengan was named shield king, effectively becoming the Taiping prime minister. He had big plans, including modern highways, a new postal system, medical schools, and hospitals. But first, the Taiping needed to break the imperial siege then underway and march down river to take Shanghai.

- All went according to plan, at first. But instead of being greeted as liberators, a Shanghai militia organized by Westerners repulsed the Taiping army. By now, the Western missionary community had concluded that the Taiping were heretics and that their leader was a madman.

- While Hong Rengan had hoped to find support from fellow Christians among the Westerners, the British, French, and Americans backed the Qing instead. Popular history tends to play up the roles Westerners played in the Taiping's ultimate defeat, especially the heroics of an American mercenary named Frederick Townshend Ward and the British officer Charles Gordon.

- Ward and Gordon get the glory, but more important to the survival of the Qing was Western technology and materiel support.

Zeng Guofan

- Another important actor in the Taiping drama was the Chinese statesman and Confucian scholar named Zeng Guofan. Unlike Hong, Zeng enjoyed huge success in the imperial examinations. He was a veteran official when the death of his mother in 1852 compelled him to retire from office for three years of mourning.

- This put Zeng Guofan back in Hunan province just as the Taiping were cutting a swath of destruction through the Xiang River Valley. As a local luminary, Zeng recruited and led an anti-Taiping militia that grew into a force known as the Hunan Army.

- Zeng hated the Hakka and was exceptionally bloody minded for a Confucian scholar. He regularly ordered the mass slaughter of Taiping prisoners of war and any civilians suspected of collaboration.

- Zeng was loyal to the Qing court, a trait that steadied him through many military defeats. He was also deeply conservative, virulently anti-Christian, and anti-Western. But he allied with the British and French as they threw their support to the Qing.

- When Zeng's forces finally took Nanjing in 1864, it was a bloodbath. Nanjing has had a tragic history. It was captured and sacked by the army of the Ming usurper Zhu Di in 1402.

- In 1853, the Taiping slaughtered every Manchu man, woman, and child in the city along with thousands of Chinese whom the Taiping labeled collaborators. Imperial forces did much the same in 1864. And in 1937, Nanjing was the site of months of rape and murder perpetrated by the Japanese army.

SUGGESTED READING

Platt, *Autumn in the Heavenly Kingdom*.
Rowe, *China's Last Empire*.
Spence, *God's Chinese Son*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- How did the conditions of daily life in 19th-century China contribute to the Taiping Rebellion?
- Why were the Hakka communities of South China ripe for revolution? Why would so many be drawn to the messianic vision of Hong Xiuquan?
- Why were the Taiping so hostile to traditional Chinese religious beliefs?
- Why did the Taiping fail to earn significant foreign support?
- What was required for the Qing to defeat the Taiping? How does Zeng Guofan reflect the strengths and weaknesses of the imperial system?

Lecture 22

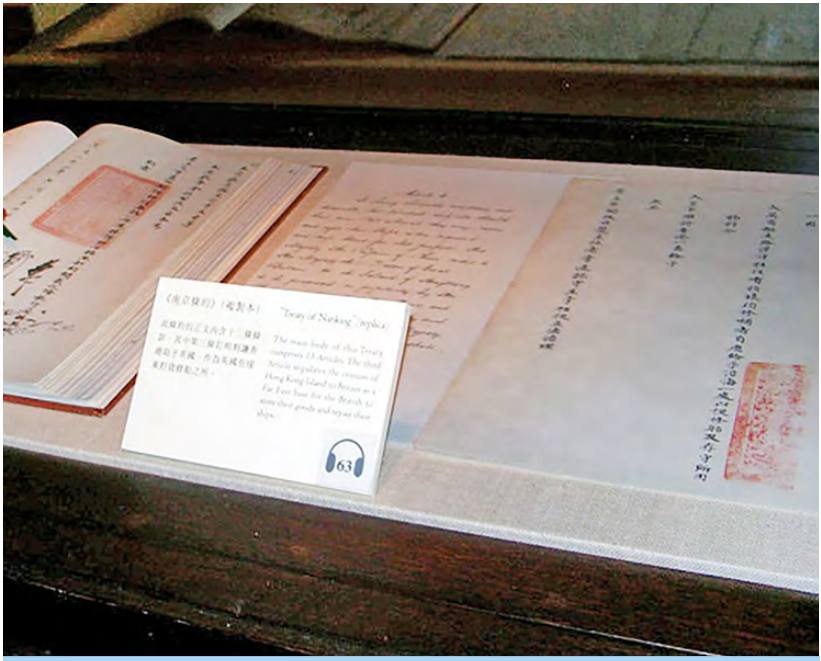
CHINA'S TREATY PORTS

The 1842 Treaty of Nanjing—which ended the Opium War—ceded Hong Kong to the British and allowed foreign traders to set up shop in five Chinese cities, including Shanghai. Within a few decades, there were dozens of these treaty ports open to foreign trade and foreign residence. And treaty ports—like the opium trade that flourished between China and British India—are fraught topics. The Chinese call them "unequal treaties." They are emblematic of an era during which foreigners subjected a once-great empire to political, economic, and even cultural domination.

Officials sign the Treaty of Nanking

THE PORTS

- The first five treaty ports in 1842 were:
  - Canton (or Guangzhou), which was already a locus of Western trade.
  - Xiamen and Fuzhou, on the coast of Fujian province. These ports also were plugged into China's trade with Southeast Asia, but heretofore off-limits to foreign residence
  - Ningbo in Zhejiang province and Shanghai in Jiangsu. Ningbo and Shanghai provided access to the core of the Chinese economy, starting from the Yangtze River delta and radiating out into the trade networks of the Yangtze River watershed.



The Hong Kong Museum of History's replica of the Treaty of Nanking

- In addition, the British colony of Hong Kong and the nearby Portuguese colony at Macau closely mirrored treaty ports. The same went for Euro-Asian hybrid cities like Singapore, Batavia, and Manila farther offshore.

- In the face of the defeat by Britain in the Opium War, the ruling Qing dynasty decided the way to deal with Britain was to encourage competition between it and other foreign powers. The Qing granted most-favored nation trading status to the United States and France and—by the end of the 19th century—to most major powers.

- Most-favored nations enjoy all the privileges negotiated by other nations. These countries had equal access to—and the same privileges in—China's treaty ports. The most important of these privileges—and the most galling to Chinese sensibilities—was extraterritoriality.

- Extraterritoriality meant that if you were living in China in the 19th century, you weren't subject to the laws of the Qing dynasty. You couldn't be sued, or tried, in Chinese courts. Instead, your case was adjudicated by a consular court. This legal formula also meant that large parts of the major treaty ports were governed by foreigners.

- Maps of 19th-century Shanghai depict a large, combined British and American concession known as the Shanghai International Settlement. It rested along the bank of the Huangpu River. A separate French concession lay southwest of the international settlement. A third chunk of Shanghai was the Chinese walled city, which remained under Qing rule.

- Although Shanghai had the largest foreign concessions, many other treaty ports were also pocketed with these self-governing enclaves. They were overseen by consular officials and patrolled by police forces organized by foreigners.

- Over the course of the treaty-port era from 1842 to 1949, many Chinese people moved into the concessions and eventually became the majority population. Chinese people living in the concessions were often treated as second-class citizens.

- But the concessions also attracted prosperous Chinese merchants and sometimes provided sanctuary and inspiration for Chinese revolutionaries. For instance, the Chinese Communist Party had its inaugural meeting in Shanghai's French concession.

- The treaty ports of China weren't radically different from the hybrid entrepôts that had sprung up across Asia in response to the arrival of the Europeans back in the 16th century. The European influx sparked large-scale Chinese emigration into maritime Asia.

- By the beginning of the 17th century, large Chinese communities had formed in the Dutch East Indies, southern Japan, the Philippines, Malacca, modern-day Malaysia, and in southern Taiwan. These hybrid colonies merged European governance and Chinese commercial activity. In time, these places became major nodes in the global economy, as would many of China's treaty ports.

INDENTURED LABOR

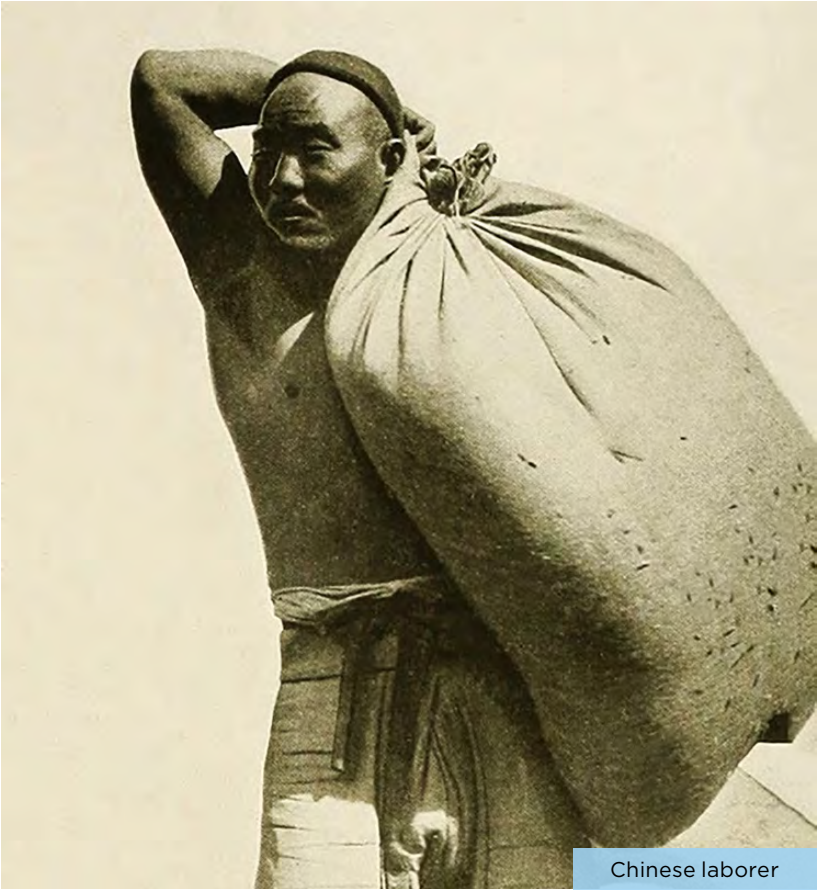
- Some treaty ports and foreign colonies, like Macao, figured prominently in some abominable practices. Foreign firms shipped Chinese indentured laborers overseas, often against their will and frequently under harsh conditions.

- Three developments spawned the indentured-labor trade: the massive supply of labor in China, the end of the Atlantic slave trade, and a new global demand for raw materials such as Caribbean sugar, Dutch East Indies rubber, and Peruvian guano.

- China was particularly well positioned to fill the demand for labor. Its 19th-century population was approaching 450 million. There was an acute land shortage. Both rebellion and natural disaster pushed millions of people off the land.

- Treaty ports were an obvious magnet for labor. They needed lots of workers to serve the docks, warehouses, restaurants, alehouses, brothels, and the burgeoning manufacturing sector.

- Most indentured laborers were ostensibly contract workers, and many did sign contracts. Some were tricked and others were simply driven by hope or desperation to agree to the terms. There was some appeal—an offer of good pay, decent food, and comfortable accommodations. But the realities of overseas work rarely lived up to the promises.



Chinese laborer

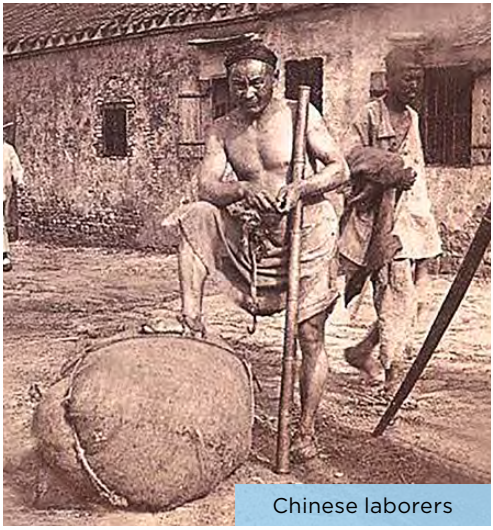
- Sometimes Chinese recruiters, called crimps, resorted to abduction. One crimp named Hoe Teik from Xiamen, on China's southeast coast, confessed to having kidnapped 154 people and selling them for a total of more than $5,000.

- Once in the custody of a crimp, a worker would be bundled off to the closest port and imprisoned onboard a cramped receiving ship or penned up in one of the notorious barracoons, known in Chinese as *zhuzi guan* (or "pig pens"). One barracoon in Xiamen was 24 feet by 120 feet and housed 500 people in squalid conditions.

- Of the workers who were shipped to Havana, more than 10 percent died in transit, and many more didn't survive their contracts. The voyage to the guano mines of Peru was even deadlier, claiming the lives of 30–40 percent of the laborers. Of those who made it to the guano mines, it's been estimated that up to two-thirds of them died in servitude.

- A typical contract was for five to eight years, but many scams sought to extend that period. When it came to guano mining on Peru's Chincha Islands, even a five-year contract might be a death sentence.

- The fertilizer on these islands was in high demand in Europe. But it was a living hell for Chinese laborers. In some places, t`he guano was more than 100 feet thick. The laborers who hacked away at these mountains of excrement—and dumped it down chutes, directly into the holds of ships below—breathed in a lethal dust.



Chinese laborers

- On the sugar islands of the Caribbean, Chinese laborers were brought in to replace African slaves. According to an international investigative commission, laborers in Cuba were tortured, branded, and sometimes beaten to death for minor infractions. The bad press this generated ultimately forced colonial Spain to address some of the deplorable conditions.

- In many ways, the indentured-labor trade was emblematic of the weakness of late imperial China, which would collapse early in the 20th century. But it was also an arena in which China's last dynasty, the Qing, scored one of its few foreign policy successes, pressuring Spain and Peru to proscribe the indentured-labor trade and prosecute those involved.

CHINESE EMIGRATION

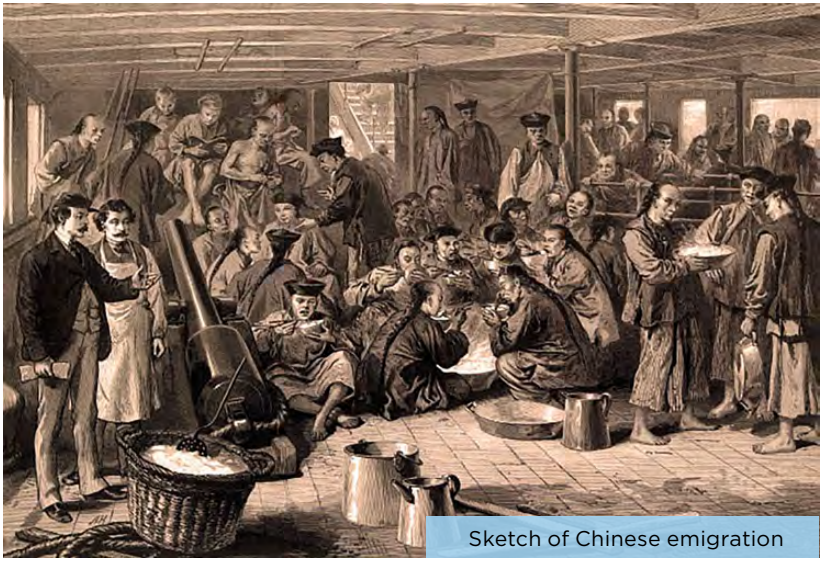
- The indentured-labor trade wasn't the entirety of Chinese movement. Chinese emigration exploded in the 19th century, thanks in part to treaty ports. But this wasn't an entirely new occurrence. More than 6 million of the initial wave of 7.5 million émigrés were bound for destinations that Chinese had been emigrating to for centuries: mostly Malaya, Indochina, Thailand, the Dutch East Indies, and the Philippines

- About 100,000 others went to Australia and 600,000 to North and South America. By comparison, fewer than 400,000 Chinese laborers ended up in the Caribbean and Peru, where the worst abuses of the indentured-labor trade took place.

- The majority of Chinese who came to the United States arrived of their own free will and were largely free from deplorable indentured-labor contracts. In 1849, there were 54 Chinese in the entire state of California. In 1876, there were more than 100,000.

- These Chinese communities would ultimately arouse intense hostility as unwanted labor competition, stereotyped as an alien population of opium smokers and notorious criminal tongs. Those are unfair stereotypes.

- In the early years of the California Gold Rush, Chinese labor was welcomed. Chinese provided essential services such as cooks, laundrymen, carpenters, and stevedores, as well as providing more specialized labor in land reclamation.



Sketch of Chinese emigration

COMPRADORS

- Some Chinese prospered in China in the treaty ports themselves. These were the much-maligned compradors, criticized by both communists and extreme nationalists. (*Comprador* is Spanish for "buyer.") A comprador was the Chinese manager of a foreign firm.

- Beginning with the Treaty of Nanjing, foreign firms gradually gained unprecedented access to the Chinese market. But they had almost no experience at doing business directly with the Chinese population. As a result, a new merchant class became a crucial interface.

- Commercial syndicates were often controlled by natives of a specific province, and sometimes by men from a single county or town. If a trader wanted to do business with the bankers of Shanxi province, for instance, it was an immense help if the trader's comprador was a Shanxi native. Compradors also liaised between governments, imperial and colonial, alike.

THE TAKEAWAY

- Sensational images of inequality and subjugation dominate much of the discourse about treaty ports. To be sure, China's treaty ports were sites of exploitation and degradation. But treaty ports were neither entirely new nor uniformly evil.

- By placing them in larger historical context, we can begin to understand how relations between China and the wider world developed over the last five centuries. Treaty ports were not unlike the great trading cities of the past: ragged edges of empire, where cultures and economies overlapped.

- Treaty ports brought many positives, especially in terms of economic development. The areas around them became some of China's most prosperous, economically advanced, and productive regions.

- Unfortunately, this is also why these regions became targets of Japan's imperialist aggression in the 1930s and 1940s, at the nadir of China's so-called century of humiliation.

- At the same time, many of China's political movements of the 20th century started out in treaty ports. Lots of modern China's major political figures either lived in treaty ports, among Chinese communities overseas, or both. Such figures include Sun Yat-sen, Chiang Kai-shek, the Soong family, Zhou Enlai, and Deng Xiaoping.

When Deng Xiaoping became the successor to the communist leader Mao Zedong—and launched his program of "reform and opening" in the late 1970s—the areas around the old treaty ports were restyled as special economic zones. They became the motor and model for China's economic growth thereafter.

SUGGESTED READING

Antony, *Like Froth Floating on the Sea*.
Carroll, *A Concise History of Hong Kong*.
Goodman, *Native-Place, City, and Nation*.
Hao, *The Comprador in Modern China*.
Kuhn, *Chinese Among Others*.
Wilson, *Ambition and Identity*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Why are treaty ports and compradors such loaded topics in modern Chinese history?
- How might exposure to foreigners and foreign ideas shape modern Chinese identity?
- What explains the huge burst of Chinese emigration in the 19th century?
- How do the changes in the economy and society of China in the 19th century compare to those in the 16th century?

Lecture 23

EXPERIENCING CHINA'S CIVIL SERVICE EXAMS

Tens of millions of highly educated and highly motivated men endured the civil service examinations over the course of China's imperial era. Failure often meant men despaired or raged, but then began preparing for the next cycle of exams. For all its faults, the examinations system was a powerful form of ordering, integrating, and evaluating society. What the Grand Canal did for the physical integration of the empire, the examination system did for imperial China's cultural unity.

Examination hall

THE PURPOSE OF THE EXAMS

- The civil service exams were used to recruit talented young men for government service. During the Tang dynasty (circa 618 to 907), only 10 to 12 percent of imperial officials were exam graduates.

- But during the Song Dynasty (circa 960 to 1279), exams became the primary way of securing a job in the imperial bureaucracy. And by the Ming dynasty (beginning in the late 14th century) and the subsequent Qing dynasty (circa 1644 to 1912), exams were almost the only avenue for a prospective public servant to enter the civilian bureaucracy.

Depiction of civil official Jiang Shunfu

- The expansion of the examinations and their growing prestige in the Song dynasty coincided with the flourishing of the neo-Confucian movement: a moral code that emphasized propriety, respect for authority, moral cultivation, and civic mindedness. Ultimately, the imperial government made neo-Confucianism the curriculum for the exams.

- Local elites—often called literati or scholar-gentry—defined what people should study, and the emperor endorsed their choices. Scholars occupied a privileged place in local society.

- Even those who had passed the lowest level of the exams were accorded perks, exemptions from taxes, and immunity from corporal punishment. Most crucially, an exam system that had buy-in from the imperial government and local society contributed to social and political stability.

CANDIDATES

- Among the male children of the gentry class—and even among the young men who aspired to elite status from merchant families or well-to-do peasant households—preparing for the exams became a defining characteristic of life.

- The core of the educational system were ancient texts that Zhu Xi—the 12th-century architect of the neo-Confucian curriculum—had selected as best expressing the Dao, the moral way. These included the *Analects* of Confucius, compiled in the 5th century BCE, and the *Mencius*, the writings of Master Meng, who lived in the 4th century BCE.

- The first task of a young student was to learn the thousands of Chinese characters that filled the classics. By age seven or eight, a student would be entrusted to the care of a teacher, usually a man who had some examination success. Wealthy families preferred private tutors, but many young men studied in village schools.

Candidates collect near the exam-results wall

- The next task was to memorize the core classics of the exam curriculum. Particularly capable students could even write—and recite—the *Analects* in reverse. Basic preparation required memorization of texts that run to a total of more than 400,000 characters.

- Next, the young scholar would begin to master the mechanics of the *baguwen*, or eight-legged essay. This was named because it was structured around four sections of argument, each comprising parallel sub-sections. It was prefaced with an introduction and capped with a conclusion.

- The eight-legged essay is often maligned as a pedantic exercise that stifled intellectual creativity. But a more forgiving view is that the eight-legged essay is a unique way to resolve the tension between the classics-based neo-Confucian educational system and its graduates: The graduates were expected to contend with the pragmatic problems of actually governing a vast empire.

THE COUNTY EXAM

- With the classics and their commentaries memorized and the eight-legged essay practiced over and again, it was time for the young scholar to try his hand at the qualifying exams. The lowest level of such exams was the *xian-shi*: the county or prefectural exam.

- Administered over three days, the *xian-shi* was the shortest of three levels of imperial examinations. It was also the most frequent and most accessible. Although candidates tended to be about 25, youths of 14 might sit for their first exam alongside a man of 70 or 80 who had tried dozens of times previously.

- As egalitarian as this exercise might sound, the imperial government needed to guarantee the integrity, effectiveness, and prestige of the examination system. Before dawn, bells or cannons would signal that the day of the exam had arrived.

- Candidates and their sponsors—fathers, grandfathers, and teachers—would gather solemnly outside the gates of the examination hall. At around 6:00 or 7:00 am, the gates would open, and the candidates made their way to their assigned desks before the gates were locked.

- The first day consisted of two or three essay questions to be answered in the eight-legged form and a poetry section based on a set theme and rhyme scheme. At dusk, the exam books were collected, and the candidates led out of the hall. Additional tests followed the next two days. Then, for several days, the magistrate and his staff carefully read and ranked the exams.

- By the 17th and 18th centuries, some 2 to 3 million men who'd made it past a fairly easy qualifying test were competing in exams held every 18 months or so, overseen by 1,700 county magistrates and 140 prefects.

- But a given candidate's chances of passing were slim. Each county and prefecture was allotted a quota from four to five slots to as many as 40 in a populous district. Regional quotas were also set to prevent candidates in the wealthy southeastern provinces from dominating the system.

THE PROVINCIAL EXAM

- Even at the lowest level, passing an exam was like winning the lottery. Licentiates, as they were called, were allowed to wear a dark-blue gown and a special cap to signify their status. They were also in demand as teachers, secretaries, and pettifoggers (a less-than-generous term for a country lawyer).

- The licentiate was also qualified to take the triennial provincial exam. By the 18th century, somewhere between 150,000 and 200,000 licentiates competed in the provincial exams. There were 17 provincial capitals. Every three years—in late August to early September—as many as 20,000 licentiates, along with family, friends, and servants, would descend on each one of these cities.

- The scale of the examination centers was immense. An exam compound was essentially a city within a city. It contained the offices and temporary residences of the inner overseers—the officials responsible for the test questions and grading—along with more offices, kitchens, and dormitories for the functionaries who administered the tests.

- The rest of the area was taken up with row upon row of examination cells: bare stalls along endless alleys. In remote provinces, the cells numbered 2,000 or 3,000. In Nanjing, there were cells for 17,000.

- Before dawn on the day prior to an exam, all the candidates would queue up outside the great gate of the examination compound. Each candidate's name was checked against the roll. Then they were escorted to the first gate, where guards searched them.

Beijing Imperial Academy's model of exam cells

- Anything with writing on it was cause for immediate ejection and potentially a ban from future tests. A second search was conducted at the inner gate, and it wasn't rare for guards to extort bribes by threatening to plant a cheat sheet on a helpless candidate.

- A candidate's first task would be to find their assigned cell, stamped on their entrance receipt, before sleeping. Early the next morning, scores of officials fanned out to recheck candidate identifications, making sure everyone was in his assigned cell.

- Entrance receipts were collected and answer books distributed. Then, the first round of questions was posted. Candidates had two days to compose answers. At dusk on the third day, the papers were collected and the candidates escorted out. After a day of rest, they returned for another three-day round, followed by another day off, and then a final session. All told, these exams lasted a week to 10 days.

- In the first round of grading, assistant examiners separated the passing tests from the failures. Since 1–2 percent of the candidates passed, the senior examiners were confronted with grading perhaps 100–200 tests. They could still fail a paper that made it past the first round, but their primary task was to rank the successful candidates.

- When the final decisions were made, the successful candidates' names were printed on a huge placard and posted at the main gate. But there was more: The top five names were left blank and, with great ceremony, the senior examiner would write them in one by one. As each name was written, a single heart soared while the hopes of thousands were dashed.

- The losers gathered their belongings for the trip home. The winners—newly minted *juren*, meaning "elevated men"—prepared themselves for banquets and ceremonies recognizing their achievement. Their average age was about 31. Upon returning home, more celebrations, feasting, and gift exchanges ensued.

- In some cases, a few *juren* might be offered positions in the government. But the majority would focus on prepping for the capital exam held the following winter.

THE METROPOLITAN AND PALACE EXAMS

- Some 10,000 to 15,000 *juren* would make the triennial trek to Beijing to sit for the metropolitan exam, which was largely similar to the ordeal of the provincial exam. One key difference: The senior examiners were the most senior officials in the empire.

- The questions had to be answered in the form of a memorial, in other words, an official letter to the emperor. This was a test of the candidate's views on current affairs and policy issues and a test of his mastery of official forms.

- The successful candidates—200 or 300 in all—were now *jinshi*, meaning "presented scholars." They were guaranteed a job in the bureaucracy.

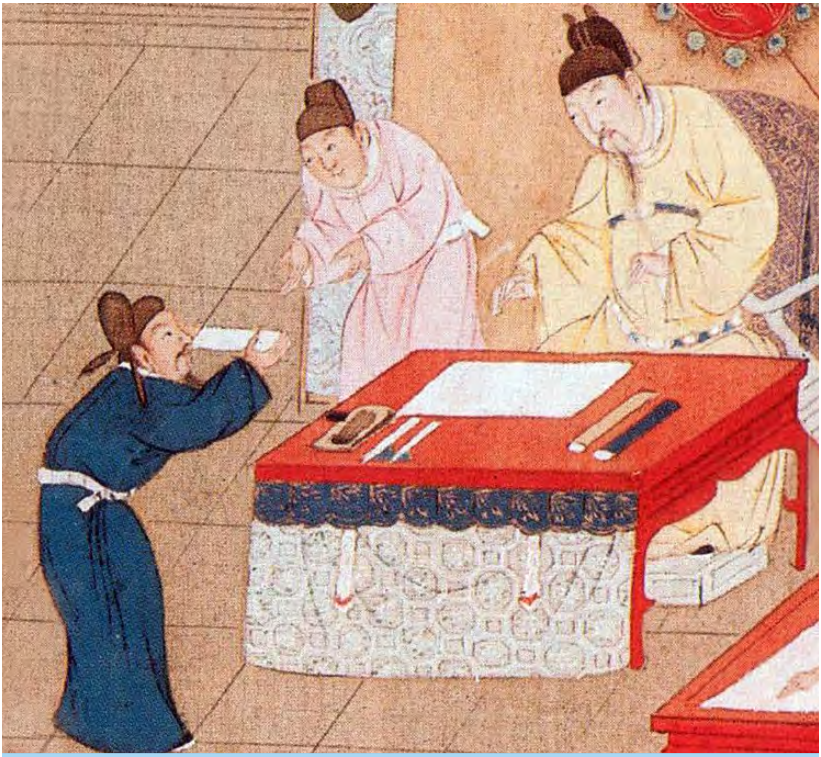
- But first, their status was enshrined in one final test: the palace exam, administered in the imperial palace, and sometimes in the presence of the emperor. Barring a major gaffe, everyone passed the palace exam. It was here that final rankings were made.

- The top three spots were the most coveted. These elite finalists became instant celebrities. The top three were also fast-tracked into the emperor's personal think tank, the Hanlin Academy.

THE POWER OF THE EXAMS

- If the chances of examination success were slim, why did tens of millions of young men and their families make the investment? For one, preparing for the exams—and becoming classically literate in non-vernacular Chinese—elevated one above the rest of society. It didn't make you a member of the elite, but preparing for exams was expected of the elite.

- Even people who failed the exams received an education that gave them a lot in common with the *jinshi* who served as county magistrates or provincial governors. That bond meant that local officials increasingly relied on the educated local elite who had endured the examination prep.



The emperor interacts with a candidate during a civil service examination.

- Furthermore, because of partible inheritance—all sons got a share of the estate—there was always downward pressure on wealth and power. Training one's sons, or educating the sons of an extended family, was a hedge against downward mobility. One *jinshi* every three generations seems to have been enough to maintain a family's social standing.

- The classical examinations ended abruptly in 1905 amid a rush of modernization. In many ways, the exams had become a symbol of everything that was wrong with the imperial system. The goal was to replace the tests with a national school system. But that national school system was still in its infancy.

- There was now nothing of substance to maintain the bond between local elites themselves and between local elites and the imperial state. With numerous other elements of the imperial system either demolished or in the process of major reforms, China's last imperial dynasty collapsed less than a decade later.

SUGGESTED READING

Elman, *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China*.
Man-Cheong, *The Class of 1761*.
Miyazaki, *China's Examination Hell*.
Wu, *The Scholars*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Why would millions of bright young men devote themselves to studying for tests that they had only a slight chance of passing?

- What must it have been like to live in a society that placed such a huge emphasis on scholarship and the examination system?

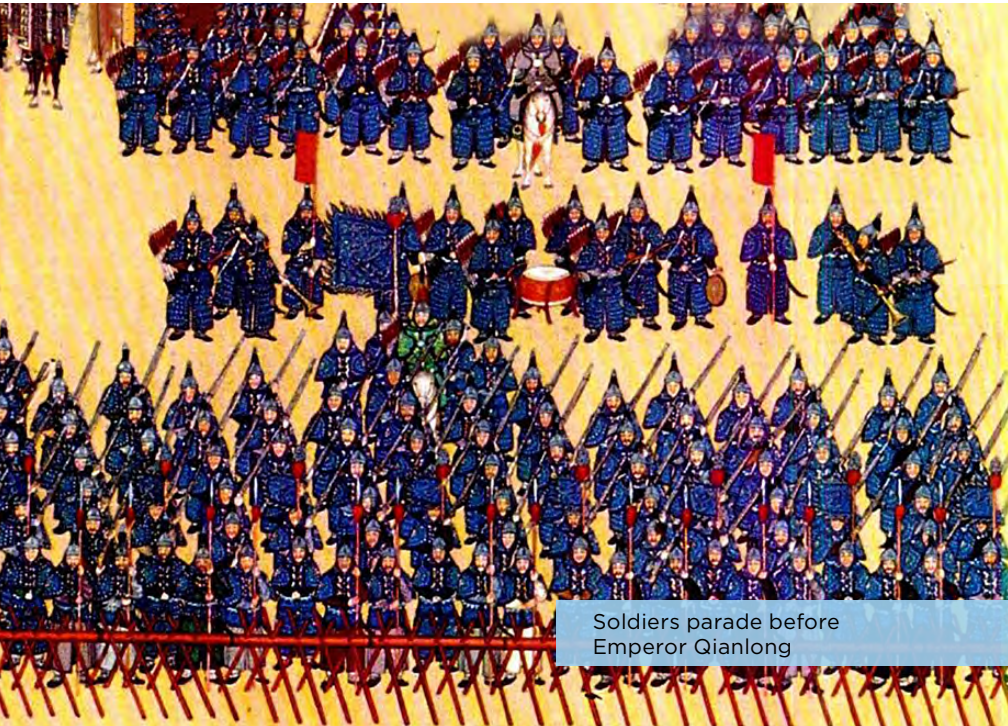
- What might it have been like to take the imperial examinations? What were the implications of failing? What were the implications of passing?

- Why was the examination system such a central part of the success of the imperial system? How did its termination undermine the imperial system?

Lecture 24

CHINA'S LAST DYNASTY: FALL OF THE MANCHUS

This lecture contrasts two ends of Manchu society: the emperor at the top and his soldiers at the bottom. It also contrasts two ends of Manchu era: from the active and engaged emperors of the early Qing—including imperial leaders like Kangxi and Qianlong—to their ill-fated descendant, Pu Yi, the powerless boy-emperor who came to the throne in 1908. In addition, the lecture traces the decline of the Manchus' military prowess, taking a look at the Manchu warriors who conquered China in the 17th century versus the orphan warriors of the 19th and 20th centuries. *Orphan warrior* is a Manchu term for one who fights valiantly even after being abandoned.



Soldiers parade before Emperor Qianlong

BANNERS

- To understand the Manchus' decline, a good starting point is an examination of the banner system. The term *banner* refers to a literal banner, the insignia of a military unit. A banner consisted of 7,500 warriors divided into five regiments of 1,500. Each regiment consisted of five companies of 300 men.

- The military commander Nurhaci wanted to build a military machine designed for conquest, but first he had to unify the feuding nomadic clans of what is now Manchuria. The banners allowed him to do both.

- In fact, Manchu was less an ethnicity than it was a fictive kinship granted to the warriors who first rallied to Nurhaci. Nurhaci organized them into banners to overcome competing identities and render them loyal to him alone.

- The banners were self-governing. Banner men and their families were a hereditary caste expected to supply warriors and military equipment when needed. Banner men were subject to their own legal system and prohibited from engaging in trade or manual labor. Over time, banners became the administrative core of the 17th-century Manchu military, and the organizing principle of Manchu society.

- As of 1644, there were 24 banners total: eight Manchu, eight Mongol, and eight of what were called martial Chinese. The Mongol and martial Chinese banners were also military organizations and the means by which emperor and khan integrated their new subjects.

- But the Manchu banners were always the elite, both as administrators and warriors. The supreme warrior and the supreme administrator was the emperor. All Qing emperors were men of Nurhaci's clan.

EMPERORS AT WORK

Emperor Kangxi

- Emperor Kangxi, who reigned from 1661 to 1722, and Emperor Qianlong, who reigned from 1735 to 1795, deeply involved themselves in the planning and execution of the great campaigns that would subjugate Taiwan, Tibet, and Xinjiang as well as blunt Russian moves.

- And although Kangxi and Qianlong didn't take personal command of the army as Nurhaci had, they regularly inspected their banners and drilled as warriors themselves. They led great hunting expeditions that enhanced esprit de corps and reinforced loyalty to the emperor.

- The Manchus were also masters of civil governance. A Manchu emperor, also known as the Son of Heaven, was expected to be a hardworking ruler who enacted enlightened policies that benefited his people and integrated a vast multiethnic empire.

- Emperors Kangxi and Qianlong put in 16-hour workdays. During that time, they reviewed official documents; ruled on administrative promotions, appointments, and demotions; and provided the final say on criminal cases that carried the death penalty. That was on top of overseeing the military.

THE PRIME OF THE MANCHU ERA

- The Manchu banner men occupied garrisons across the empire. In the 17th century, they dined on a steady diet of war, conquest, and plunder. As boys, they'd been raised in the saddle and mastered archery. Few opponents could match the speed of the Manchu cavalry or the lethality of the Manchu bow. As Manchu power grew, their armies incorporated infantry and gunpowder weapons, but the mounted archer remained the core of the military and of Manchu identity.

- As they settled in to rule China, the Qing established academies in Beijing to educate banner men for service in the civil bureaucracy. The Emperor wanted Manchu administrators who were a match for their Chinese counterparts, but he never wanted them to forget that theirs was a military ethos.

- Banner men were expected to live a frugal life, dedicated to the profession of arms and fanatically devoted to the emperor. Manchu candidates for the civil service exams were still required to be proficient in archery and horsemanship. In Beijing, the banner men were charged with protecting the emperor and his extended family.

- Out in China's provinces, banner garrisons were located in major cities and at key strategic nodes. There were orders not to abuse the locals, but the Qing wanted their subjects to know who was in control.

Banner men on an imperial hunting trip

THE HANGZHOU GARRISON

- Hangzhou is a city located near China's east coast that eventually became home to a Manchu garrison. The Manchu conquest of the Yangtze River Delta region known as Jiangnan, where Hangzhou is located, was particularly bloody.

- The Manchu decision to establish a garrison of banner men and their families in Hangzhou was designed to be both symbolic and strategic. The choice was symbolic because Jiangnan had been a center of earlier resistance but was now the source of many of the new dynasty's civil servants. The choice was strategic because Hangzhou anchored the Grand Canal. That was the empire's central artery through which Beijing's soldiers and bureaucrats were fed on southern rice.

- The Manchu way was all about mobility. However, the garrisons penned them up in walled compounds inside or alongside walled cities surrounded by dense suburbs, crisscrossed by irrigation works and chopped up into rice paddies.

- In Hangzhou, the banner garrison occupied 240 acres in the northwestern corner of the city. It was home to 6,000 to 8,000 banner men and another 12,000 to 15,000 dependents.

- In the interior of China, Manchu skill waned. When Emperor Kangxi visited the Hangzhou garrison at the turn of the 18th century, he was impressed with the riding and archery of his banner men. A century later, Qianlong seemed to have nothing but disdain for them. And by the late 19th century, it was the rare banner man who owned a horse.

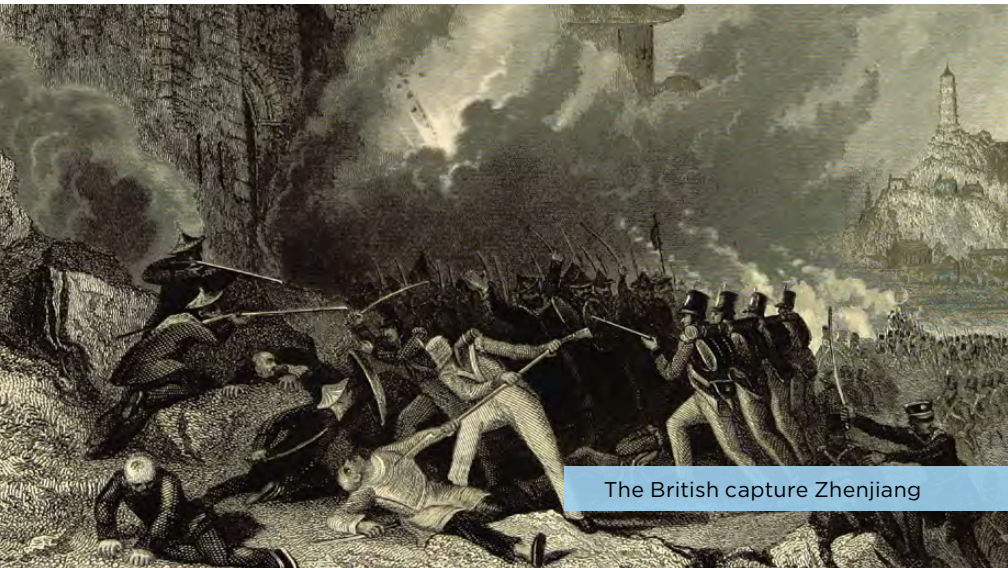
THE 1800S

- The Manchus of the early 1800s were beginning to fear their Chinese neighbors. In the Summer of 1841, a British army threatened the city of Zhenjiang, upstream from Hangzhou. The commander of Zhenjiang's Manchu garrison, a man named Hailing, was more concerned with ferreting out Chinese traitors than he was in defending the city.

- Thousands of innocents were caught up in Hailing's witch hunt. Hundreds of supposed Chinese traitors were executed as the banner men panicked. When the British attacked in July 1842, Zhenjiang was in such a state of chaos that the great walled city fell to a small force of British in the course of a morning.

- Matters were even bleaker during the Taiping Rebellion from 1850 to 1864. The banners were simply overwhelmed by Taiping armies. The Taiping offered no quarter to the Manchus, slaughtering men, women, and children.

- The Hangzhou garrison heroically held off the Taiping for several years, but in December 1861, the Chinese militia deserted their posts and abandoned Hangzhou's gates to the Taiping. The 10,000 Manchus trapped in the city chose suicide over capture.



The British capture Zhenjiang

AFTER THE REBELLION

- The Qing dynasty survived the Taiping Rebellion—but barely. Rebuilding Manchu life in Hangzhou was championed by the head of the Guwalgiya clan, led by a Manchu named Fengrui.

- In the late 1800s, many Manchus flocked to Beijing to attend the new technical schools and military academies established as part of the dynasty's efforts at modernization.

- Those efforts were put to the test when, in 1894, China and Japan went to war over China's traditional sphere of influence in Korea. The Qing military was humiliated, and Beijing was forced to accept the "independence" of Korea and the cession of Taiwan.

- These were just the latest losses: The Qing had also ceded vast swaths of territory to the Russians. Indo-China was now a French sphere of influence and Tibet fell into the British orbit. In the empire's core, those same powers were also carving out spheres of influence.

ATTEMPTS AT REVIVAL

- Many Manchus and Chinese still held out hope for a restoration along the lines of Japan's Meiji reforms, which created a modern Japanese state unified under an emperor. Among them was Fengrui's son, Jinliang. He pinned his hopes on Emperor Guangxu, a young monarch just beginning to emerge from the shadow of his imposing aunt, Empress Dowager Cixi.

Emperor Guangxu

- In 1898, Guangxu launched an agenda of progressive reforms aimed at solving the weaknesses exposed by the war with Japan. But reactionary elements in the Manchu aristocracy, led by the empress dowager, crushed these efforts. Guangxu was placed under house arrest; many of his supporters were executed and others fled into exile.

- Jinliang avoided the purge and later served dutifully in a variety of official posts, many of them relating to the care and feeding of his fellow orphan warriors.

THE FALL

- By the turn of the 20th century, the once-formidable Qing seemed crippled. Close to Beijing, the British had a naval base at Weihaiwei. Germany had a presence at Qingdao and the Japanese were located at Port Arthur in southern Manchuria. Foreign troops were stationed along the rail line from Beijing to the coast, effectively holding the Qing capital hostage.

- In Hangzhou, the garrison had become emblematic of the strategic irrelevance and symbolic impotence of the Manchu banners. By the time Cixi and Guangxu died in 1908, the Qing was fatally weakened.

- Before that, in 1905, the Qing eliminated the old civil service exams and introduced a new national curriculum. Almost overnight, millions of the empire's most loyal subjects—those who had studied for the traditional exams—felt betrayed.

- Then the government tried to nationalize China's railroads, which alienated provincial elites who had invested in private railroads. Military reforms also backfired. The so-called New Army was manned largely by Chinese, many of whom were secretly members of anti-Qing movements.

HENRY PU YI

- A boy named Henry Pu Yi was two years old when he became Qing emperor in 1908. Pu Yi's great-aunt, Empress Dowager Cixi, had acted as informal regent to two young emperors before him: her son, Emperor Tongzhi (reign dates 1861 to 1875) and her nephew Guangxu (reign dates 1875 to 1908). But these two emperors did not rule. Cixi had been the power behind the throne for nearly half a century.

- When Guangxu tried to reassert the emperor's administrative power in 1898, Cixi quashed those efforts. It's clear that as she faced her own death, Cixi had Guangxu poisoned. He wouldn't get a second chance to rule. And because her great power had been personal rather than institutional, it died with her.

- Pu Yi's influence didn't reach beyond the walls of Beijing's Forbidden City, if it reached even that far. In October 1911, a unit of the New Army—stationed in the industrial center of Wuchang, in central Hubei province—mutinied, and touched off sympathetic revolts across the empire.

- To control the crisis, the imperial court appointed the former commander of the New Army to the position of prime minister of a new constitutional monarchy. His name was Yuan Shikai.

- When Yuan was called upon to suppress the smoldering rebellion, he refused, and instead demanded that Pu Yi abdicate. Five days after his sixth birthday, the last Qing emperor stepped down in favor of a Chinese republic.

Emperor Pu Yi

- But two decades later, Pu Yi was back on the throne, propped up as ruler of a Japanese puppet state in the old Manchu homeland. It was called Manchukuo and lasted until August 1945.

- To his credit, Jinliang, the idealistic orphan warrior, never endorsed Manchukuo. He saw that collaboration with Japan was an embarrassing postscript to the remarkable history of the Manchus and a sad but all-too-human end to the history of imperial China.

SUGGESTED READING

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- How do the Manchus compare to the Mongols?

- Why was the warrior ethos so central to the Manchus? Why would the Manchus want to maintain their distinctive identity?

- How did daily life in Hangzhou differ from daily life in the Manchu homeland?

- How does the decline of the Manchu garrison at Hangzhou mirror the decline of imperial China?

- Why did the imperial system unravel so quickly?

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Miyazaki, Ichisada. *China's Examination Hell: The Civil Service Examinations of Imperial China*. Conrad Schirokauer, trans. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981. The classic inside view of the trials and tribulations of being an examination candidate in late imperial China. This work is rich in detail on the mechanics of the examination levels. Miyazaki also addresses the social implications of success and failure for the candidates.

Mollier, Christine. *Buddhism and Taoism Face to Face: Scripture, Ritual, and Iconographic Exchange in Medieval China*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008. Five case studies of how Buddhists and Daoists borrowed and adapted each other's sacred texts, iconography, and religious practices.

Mote, Frederick. *Imperial China: 900–1800.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003. A more traditional political history of medieval to premodern China that is valuable on the conquest dynasties and on China's relations with its northern neighbors.

National Geographic. *The Diva Mummy*. 2004. An excellent documentary that explores the funerary practices, preservation techniques, material culture, and cuisine of Han China through the prism of the tomb of Xin Zhui, also known as the Lady Dai. Also features the results of the autopsy performed on the amazingly well-preserved corpse, revealing not just Lady Dai's last meal but also the likely cause of death.

Needham, Joseph. *Science and Civilization in China*, vol. 4, part 3. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986. This is but one volume of Needham's massive project on the history of science and technology in China. This is the definitive volume on hydraulic engineering.

NOVA. *Secrets of Lost Empires: China Bridge*. NOVA, 2000 A documentary featuring engineers and historians building a replica of the rainbow bridge from the Qingming scroll.

Odoric of Pordenone and Paolo Chiesa. *The Travels of Friar Odoric: 14th Century Journal of the Blessed Odoric of Pordenone*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2001. Odoric traveled through the Mongol empire a generation after Marco Polo.

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PBS. *Secrets of the Dead: China's Terracotta Warriors*. 2011. A well-crafted documentary with some very useful information on the mechanics of creating the terracotta army for the tomb of the first emperor.

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Platt, Stephen R. *Autumn in the Heavenly Kingdom: China, the West, and the Epic Story of the Taiping Civil War*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012. The story of what might be the bloodiest civil war in history told from the perspective of the two military commanders who squared off in the late stages of the

conflict. They were Hong Rengan, who was an advocate of modernization and Westernization, and Zeng Guofan, a Confucian scholar and die-hard conservative who led the Qing forces to ultimate victory over the Taiping.

Polachek, James M. *The Inner Opium War*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992. An inside account of the Qing dynasty's response to both opium addiction and opium smuggling. After much debate, the Qing settled on a policy of eradication that led to war with Great Britain.

Pomeranz, Kenneth. *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009. In the 18th century, the standard of living in China's lower Yangtze region, Jiangnan, was as high, if not higher than that in the most developed regions of Western Europe at the time. Pomeranz seeks to answer why China eventually fell behind, locating the reason more in geology and geography rather than culture or technology. Of particular value are his comparisons of the economies of Europe and China on the eve of the modern era.

Pregadio, Fabrizio, *Great Clarity: Daoism and Alchemy in Early Medieval China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006. Pregadio takes a lot of the mystery out of the relationship between alchemy and religious Daoism by showing the intimate relationship between the two during the Northern and Southern dynasties.

Pu, Yi, and Paul M. Kramer. *The Last Manchu: The Autobiography of Henry Pu Yi, Last Emperor of China*. New York: Pocket Books, 1984. The inspiration for Bernardo Bertolucci's 1987 film *The Last Emperor*, covering Pu Yi's life. A unique perspective on the history of modern China.

Pulleyblank, E. G. *The Background of the Rebellion of An Lu-shan*. London: Oxford University Press, 1955. Pulleyblank charts the cause and assesses the near-term and long-term consequences of the rebellion that brought the golden age of the Tang dynasty to a bloody end.

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Rawski, Evelyn. *Agricultural Change and the Peasant Economy of South China*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987. Rawski compares and contrasts the development of commerce and agriculture in the coastal province of Fujian and the inland province of Hunan.

Rockhill, W. W., trans. *The Journey of William of Rubruck to the Eastern Parts of the World.* London: Hahkluyt Society, 1900. Available at https://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/text/rubruck.html. One Franciscan monk's gritty account of the lives, the loves, the diet, and the table manners of the Mongols.

Rowe, William T. *China's Last Empire: The Great Qing.* Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. The Qing dynasty was the apotheosis of an imperial system that had cohered this vast domain for a millennium. These Manchu warriors created a huge multiethnic empire, but even at the peak of its power in the late 18th century, the Qing found itself largely incapable of controlling an unruly and exploding population of increasingly mobile subjects and unable to systematically tap into a commercial economy that was undergoing revolutionary changes. These paradoxes coalesced in China's long 19th century as the dynasty was wracked by massive rebellions and repeatedly humiliated by foreign powers.

Schaefer, Edwin M. *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand: A Study of T'ang Exotics*. University of California Press, 1985. From emperor to commoner, the people of Tang China had an insatiable appetite for products from the furthest reaches of the known world. Schaefer highlights the extent to which Tang China was connected to the wider world by land and by sea and explores the rich material culture of the era.

Schirokauer, Conrad, and Miranda Brown. *A Brief History of Chinese Civilization*, 4th ed. Boston: Wadsworth, 2012. One of the best single-volume histories of China.

Shen Fu. *Six Records of a Floating Life*. Annotated by Leonard Pratt and Chiang Su Hui. New York: Penguin Classics, 2004. An intimate portrait of married life, love, children, family, sex, and travel, written by a minor official and traveling art dealer at the turn of the 19th century.

Smith, Paul J. *Taxing Heaven's Storehouse: Horses, Bureaucrats, and the Destruction of the Sichuan Tea Industry, 1074–1224*. Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 1991. Tea from lush Sichuan paid for the horses from Tibet and Qinghai that were essential to the Song dynasty's northern defense. The Song initially proved highly successful in extracting tea from Sichuan to pay for imported horses. Both the economy and population of Sichuan saw explosive growth followed by a catastrophic implosion of the tea industry.

Spence, Jonathan. "Food" in *Chinese Roundabout: Essays in History and Culture*, pp. 165–204. New York: W. W. Norton 1993. Of all of Spence's masterful achievements, this short chapter on the diets and culinary obsessions of the people of late imperial China is among my favorites.

———. *God's Chinese Son: The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom of Hong Xiuquan*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1996. This is a beautifully crafted book told largely from the perspective of Hong Xiuquan, the messianic leader of the Taiping Rebellion, and of the people who rallied to his banner in the millions. Spence is particularly good at explaining why many among the Hakka minority were drawn to Hong's teachings of Christian salvation and violent revolution.

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So, Billy. *Prosperity, Region, and Institutions in Maritime China*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2000. Song China was a huge import and export market. Chinese and foreign merchants plied the China seas in significant numbers.

Spence, Jonathan. *The Death of Woman Wang*. New York: Penguin Group, 1998. Life and death in a poor rural county during China's tumultuous 17th century.

———. *The Search for Modern China*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012. This is the best one-volume history of China from the 16th century on.

Swann, Nancy L. *Food and Money in Ancient China*. Princeton University Press, 1950. Swann's annotated translation of Ban Gu's "Treatise on Food and Money."

Swope, Kenneth M. *A Dragon's Head and a Serpent's Tail: Ming China and the First Great East Asian War, 1592–1598*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009. In this gripping account, Swope shows how Ming China mobilized to fight and win the bloody and protracted Imjin War. Far from militarily weak and strategically stunted, the Ming mastered gunpowder technology, proved adept at logistics, and dominated the naval war against Hideyoshi's Japan.

Tackett, Nicholas. *The Destruction of the Medieval Chinese Aristocracy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2016. By exploiting geographical surveys, thousands of funerary inscriptions, and the writings of Tang dynasty aristocrats, Tackett builds a powerful narrative of how the great families who had dominated dynastic politics for hundreds of years watched their world collapse but at the same time fought to maintain a measure of social and economic influence.

UNESCO. "The Grand Canal." http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1443. UNESCO's Grand Canal site contains maps and documents justifying its inclusion as a World Heritage site.

Von Glahn, Richard. *The Country of Streams and Grottoes: Expansion, Settlement, and the Civilizing of the Sichuan Frontier in Song Times.* Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 1988. Von Glahn chronicles the expansion of Han Chinese presence, imperial governance, and commercial agriculture into this once-forbidding frontier.

Waldron, Arthur, *The Great Wall of China: rom History to Myth*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990. Waldron demolishes the conventional wisdom of Chinese isolationism and its perpetually defensive mindset. The Great Wall that we know is relatively new. It is the result of a specific strategic compromise in the 16th century, not an indicator of a permanent division between China and its northern neighbors.

Weatherford, Jack. *Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World*. New York: Broadway Books, 2004. While somewhat hagiographic, Weatherford crafts a riveting tale of the rise of Temujin from desperate poverty to position of Genghis Khan.

Wills, Jr., John E. "Ban Zhao" in *Mountain of Fame: Portraits in Chinese History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996. Wills explores Chinese history through the prism of biography, here through the extraordinary life and literary achievements of the poet, historian, philosopher, and courtier Ban Zhao.

———. "The First Emperor of Qin (Qin Shihuang)" in *Mountain of Fame: Portraits in Chinese History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996. Wills's lively chapter on the Qin founder is a blend of political biography and psychological profiling.

———. "Su Dongpo" in *Mountain of Fame: Portraits in Chinese History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996. A lively brief biography of the equally lively bon vivant of the Song Dynasty, Su Dongpo.

Wilson, Andrew R. *Ambition and Identity: Chinese Merchant Elites in Colonial Manila*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004. An effort at understanding how an émigré community of merchants navigated the urban

landscape of a hybrid city and managed to thrive economically in the midst of tectonic shifts in the global economy, the regional balance of power, and the local environment.

Wu, Ching-tzu. *The Scholars*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993. An 18th-century novel that brilliantly satirizes the examination system and the young men caught up in its endless rounds of competition.

Xiong, Victor Cunrui. *Sui-Tang Chang'an (583–904): A Study in the Urban History of Medieval China*. Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 2000. A study in urban architecture, city-planning and city life in the Medieval world's greatest metropolis.

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